Creating Textures in Watercolor

A guide to painting 83 textures from grass to glass to tree bark to fur.

CATHY JOHNSON

author of Painting Nature's Details in Watercolor

Creating
Textures
in
Watercolor

strands of hair. Water tumbling over rocks.
ng reflections in glass or metal. The textures of
elements are what make your watercolor
gs come alive. They make the viewer feel as if
ld "step right into" the scenes you've created.
how do you create these textures? How do you
reating a muddy mess instead? Expert
olorist Cathy Johnson shows you, in her
al, step-by-step manner, how to create 83
nt textures, including:

ruits and vegetables
air
glass
netal
abric
lowers
ur
kin

variety of other textures

h of these textures — and their many variations
lemonstrated by Johnson's beautiful watercolor
es, all with helpful captions to illustrate specific
ques. When applied to your own paintings,
techniques will help you accurately recreate the
es you see, allowing you to create lovely
color paintings that almost seem to "breathe."
hy Johnson's expertise as an artist will show
ow to expand your own artistic vision and
er a world of textures — a world you can then
re in your paintings.

Creating Textures *in* Watercolor

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A guide to painting 83 textures from grass to glass to tree bark to fur.

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ited by Greg Albert and Rachel Wolf
signed by Sandy Conopeotis

DEDICATION

To my students,

whose intelligent questions

have helped to shape this book;

to Greg Albert,

my supportive and meticulous

and understanding editor;

and to Harris,

whose presence makes it all possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Everything has texture — surface characteristics you can feel or that affect the way a thing looks when the light hits it. Think of tree bark, rough grasses, polished glass, a baby's cheek, the glossy flanks of a thoroughbred horse. All these things share a common feature — they have a unique texture that contributes something essential to their identity.

You can capture these textures in watercolor to enhance the tactile appeal of your work. You can make each subject ring true by believably rendering soft or hard, rough or shiny, smooth or ridged surfaces. It's simply a matter of thinking through and planning ahead to capture the effect you're after.

There are those who say watercolor is tricky — impossible, at times! — and so it can be, if you are only shooting for those exciting, spontaneous effects that produce what we call "happy accidents." It's exciting, all right, but almost as dangerous as hang gliding without proper instruction. It takes practice to learn how to wing it without crashing.

Like learning to hang glide, watercolor takes practice — you don't jump off a cliff without a good grounding in the basics. Capturing textures in watercolor is much the same.

Careful observation is one of the best keys to rendering surface texture, followed by a good dose of (right-brain) thinking. How does the light hit your subject? Is it oblique or straight on? What does that tell you about what you see? Does it enhance or flatten surface characteristics? And what should you paint first to get the effect you're after? What comes second? How far should you go? And what attracted you in the first place?

It isn't necessary to paint every hair on a kitten to capture the *effect* of soft fur, or to capture every light-struck detail of a cut-glass vase; these techniques are a sort of shorthand you can carry as far as you like. (However, if you *are* into photorealism, you can "get there from here.") I prefer the simpler approach, and most of the examples in this book will reflect that simplicity.

This book includes techniques that depend heavily on the paper you choose; rough paper reacts quite differently than hot-press or plate, and if you are ready for that difference you can learn to use it to your advantage. Chapter One will lead you through the basics of paper surfaces.

Other basics depend on brushwork — drybrush, wet-in-wet, wet-onto-dry and vice versa. Watch for examples of these brush-handling techniques throughout to give you hints on which approach to choose with a specific subject.

Still other techniques are flashier — I covered a number of these in my book, *Watercolor Tricks and Techniques*, but for the purposes of this book I've distilled them to the four S's: salt, scraping, sponges and spatter. Some are more useful than others, depending on you and your needs; I seldom use salt anymore but couldn't live without spatter. You'll find your own favorites to achieve the effects you're after.

The body of the book is more basic, a simple step-by-step, show-you-how-you-can-do-it. Not, mind you, a "Here's how it's done" approach, because everybody works differently. If the specific examples I've chosen aren't for you, skip them and try something else. Look beyond the surface. Even though I may be talking about smooth, shiny apples, the same basic technique applies to pears or eggplant — to any shiny organic subject. If you like the texture I've achieved for rust but think it would work for you on moss instead, change the color and go for it.

Most of the examples in this book *are* step-by-step. I'll suggest an underwash — either simple or slightly more complex — then suggest ways you might manipulate the wash to create texture or suggest a secondary wash once the first is dry to layer on the texture. Final details add the spark needed to complete your subject, and you're through. In most cases, you'll let the wash dry thoroughly between steps — and that's what makes this approach so accessible and so much simpler (and more predictable) than many watercolor techniques. It takes patience to let the

wash dry, or a good hair dryer, but the effects are well worth it. Your frustration level is almost guaranteed to drop.

This is not a new technique: there's nothing flashy about it. It's the traditional English style of watercolor, from a century or more ago. It's learning to control a difficult medium so that next time you want to jump on that hang glider and run for the edge, you'll have the knowledge and the skill to do it. Enjoy the ride; the view is great.

This book is intended to be accessible and easy to use, like a workbook. The pages open wide to allow you to see what's going on more easily and to paint along if you like. I've used some of these samples in my workshop classes for years, and my students have enjoyed copying them. Usually they say, "Tell me this is your next book!" Well, it is, and I hope you find it as useful as they have.

PAPER SURFACES

It's hard to believe that the surface you choose can have such an effect on the texture you're depicting, but it does. Choose your paper carefully to make your task easier. A good-quality rag paper with a neutral pH will not only ensure your work will last but will make your *working* as pleasant as possible. There's nothing like trying to fight a nasty, cheap paper that wants to warp up like the Appalachians at the first touch of a wet brush.

To that end, buy the heaviest paper you can afford. Most watercolor paper comes in 90 lb. (too lightweight to use without stretching it first), 140 lb. (a good compromise that will curl some when wet but will usually flatten back out as it dries), or 300 lb., a heavyweight paper that's almost like painting on watercolor board. Of course, that's a nice idea, too, if you can afford it. Most watercolor board — good-quality paper mounted on a cardboard backing — is extremely hardy; it'll take about any kind of punishment, including scrubbing out, scraping or erasing.

Surface characteristics vary from brand to brand; get to know the papers you like and you'll know what to expect from them. Rough paper from one company may seem smooth to you after using another manufacturer's rough for a few years; another brand of hot-press may seem to have a bit of tooth, more like cold-press compared to others. Shop around; buy a pad of various papers or a set of loose samples from one of the larger suppliers. Get your feet wet along with the paper.

Rough. No matter what brand of rough you choose, it will have certain characteristics, with tiny hills and valleys created by the manufacturing process wherein paper pulp is poured out on a screen to dry. Some papers are almost like a relief map of mountains, others were obviously mechanically created, but it is these tiny bumps that catch and hold pigment.

Oddly enough, it is easier to do a flat wash — an unblemished, featureless expanse — on rough paper than it is on the smoother cold-press or hot-press. The pigment settles more or less evenly in the valleys, almost as if it averages out. But when you drybrush over that smooth wash, the paper surface itself mandates the texture. For that reason, I usually choose cold-press or hot-press; I like to make my *own* textures, thank you.

Cold-Press. This paper is weighted down as it dries, smoothing the surface either a little or a lot, depending on the manufacturer and how much pressure is applied. It's very versatile, making a smooth-enough flat wash for most purposes (how often in nature do you find a truly flat, unvarying hue, anyway?) while allowing you to overlay any texture you like with a variety of techniques.

Hot-Press or Plate. You guessed it — this one is made by pressing the paper with a hot metal surface, just like you'd iron your best shirt. It can vary from a rather vellum-like surface to a smoothness you can almost see your face in. Washes are unpredictable on hot-press paper, but very, very exciting. When I find I am tightening up too much, exerting too much control on my paintings, I get out the hot-press for spontaneous effects. Here, you *have* to create your own textures if you want recognizable ones — otherwise you'll just get puddles that depend for their surface on the paper and the characteristics of the particular pigment you've chosen.

Try samples of each to familiarize yourself with these paper types, and buy as many brands as you can afford to find the one you like best. (But don't marry it. My favorite paper is no longer imported, and I had to learn a whole new approach with much gnashing of teeth.) Pick your paper surface according to the subject you've chosen or to your mood; there's a whole world of difference before you ever set brush to paper.

(A) drybrush

(E) lifting with a wet brush, then blotting

(B) notice separation of sedimenting colors

drybrush work over wash

PAPER-INDUCED TEXTURES

- Rough Paper
- Drybrush
- Settling
- Scraping
- Lifting
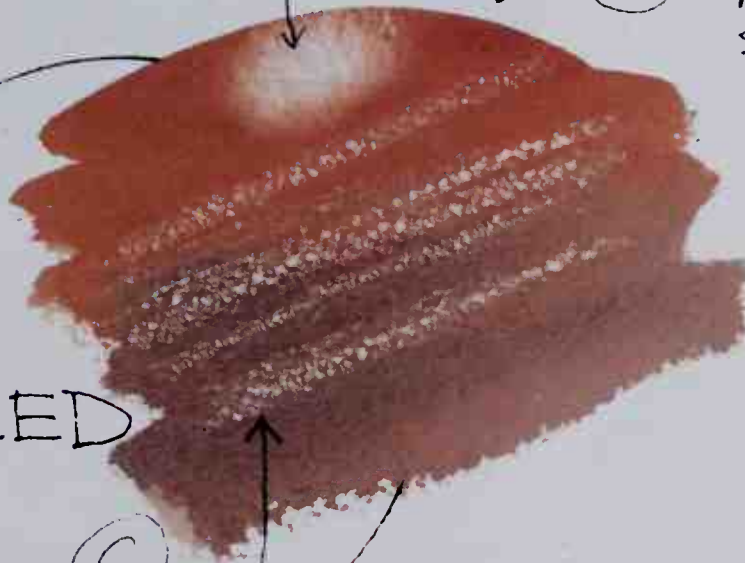
(C) lines scraped out when wash has dried
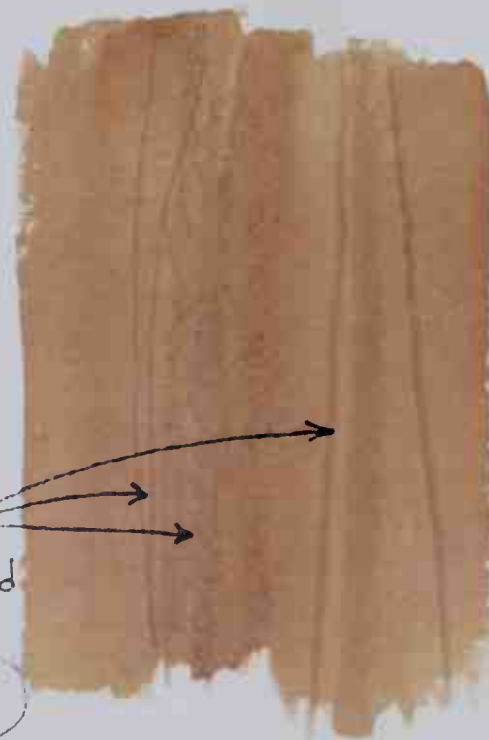
texturing lines scraped into damp wash

(D)

PAPER-INDUCED TEXTURES

- Cold-pressed Pap[er]
- Drybrush
- Settling
- Scraping
- Lifting
- Stamping

overlaid drybrush

scratching out of dry wash

scraping into a damp wash

drybrush

lifting with wet brush & blotting

settling pigments

lifting with a paper towel
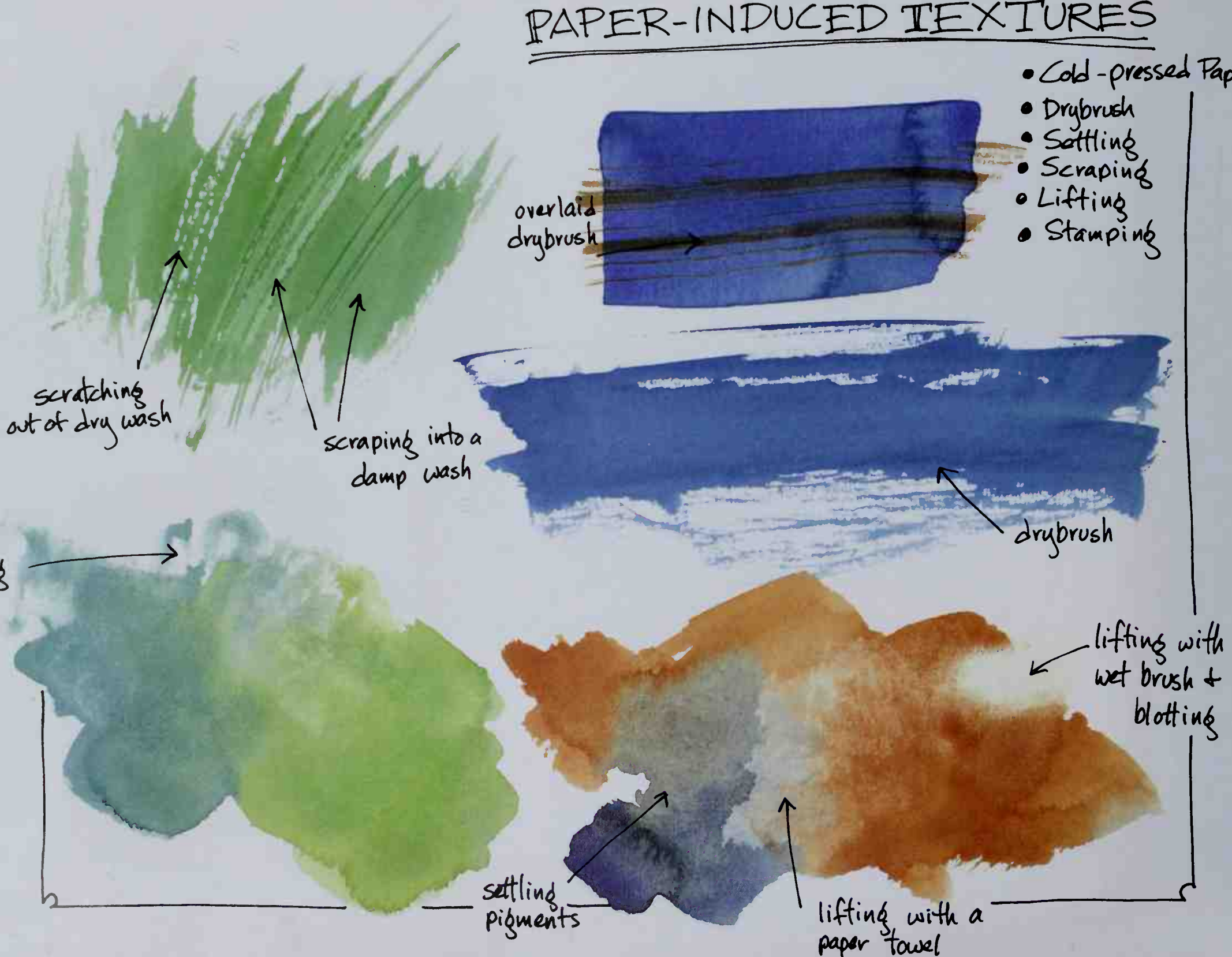
PAPER-INDUCED TEXTURES

- Hot-press paper
- Drybrush
- Settling
- Scraping
- Lifting
- Puddling

lines scratched into dry wash

lines scraped into a damp wash

wash

drybrush textures over laid

settling pigments

puddling

lifting with damp brush

stamping, lifting with a paper towel

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THE FOUR S's

There are any number of ways to manipulate pigments on your paper—plastic wrap or waxed paper impressed into damp pigment, stamping, finger painting, inks, Maskoid and rubbing alcohol, to name just a few. Here, I've narrowed the field to what I call the four S's—four simple ways to achieve big effects.

Salt can be tricky to use. If your wash is too wet, it is uncontrollable, too dry and there's no effect at all. But it can be an effective tool to suggest starry skies, the sparkle of snow, a sandy beach—or just an interesting texture. It has been somewhat overused in the past—try it with caution and restraint.

Scraping can let you achieve textures difficult to master in any other way; it's controllable but spontaneous. Depending on how wet your wash is and how you hold your scraping tool, you can make dark, fine lines in a wet wash or push the pigment from a damp one to reclaim lights. Held almost at a right angle, the scraping tool bruises the wet paper fibers, making them accept more pigment and resulting in dark lines; at a more acute angle, close to the paper, the tool produces lights in a wash that has lost its wet shine. A narrow tool makes narrow lines; the broad edge of a spatula or a trimmed credit card will give you broad areas of lighter value.

Sponges are useful for more than mopping up; you can suggest a number of textures by painting directly with them. Natural sea sponges are most useful for this, but a man-made sponge with a brick-like texture may be helpful as well. And of course, lifting color with a clean, damp sponge is easy.

My favorite texturing trick is *spatter*; I spatter into a wet wash for soft effects, into a dry wash for harder-edged spots. A clear-water spatter can produce a spray of tiny light spots that can stand in for salt, but with a softer effect. A well-aimed spray of fine water droplets at the edge of a wash will break it into a lacy edge. It all depends on what you're after.

table salt in
very wet wash - somewhat
unpredictable

- into wet wash
- into damp wash
- into dry wash
- directional

table salt
in damp
wash - more
controllable
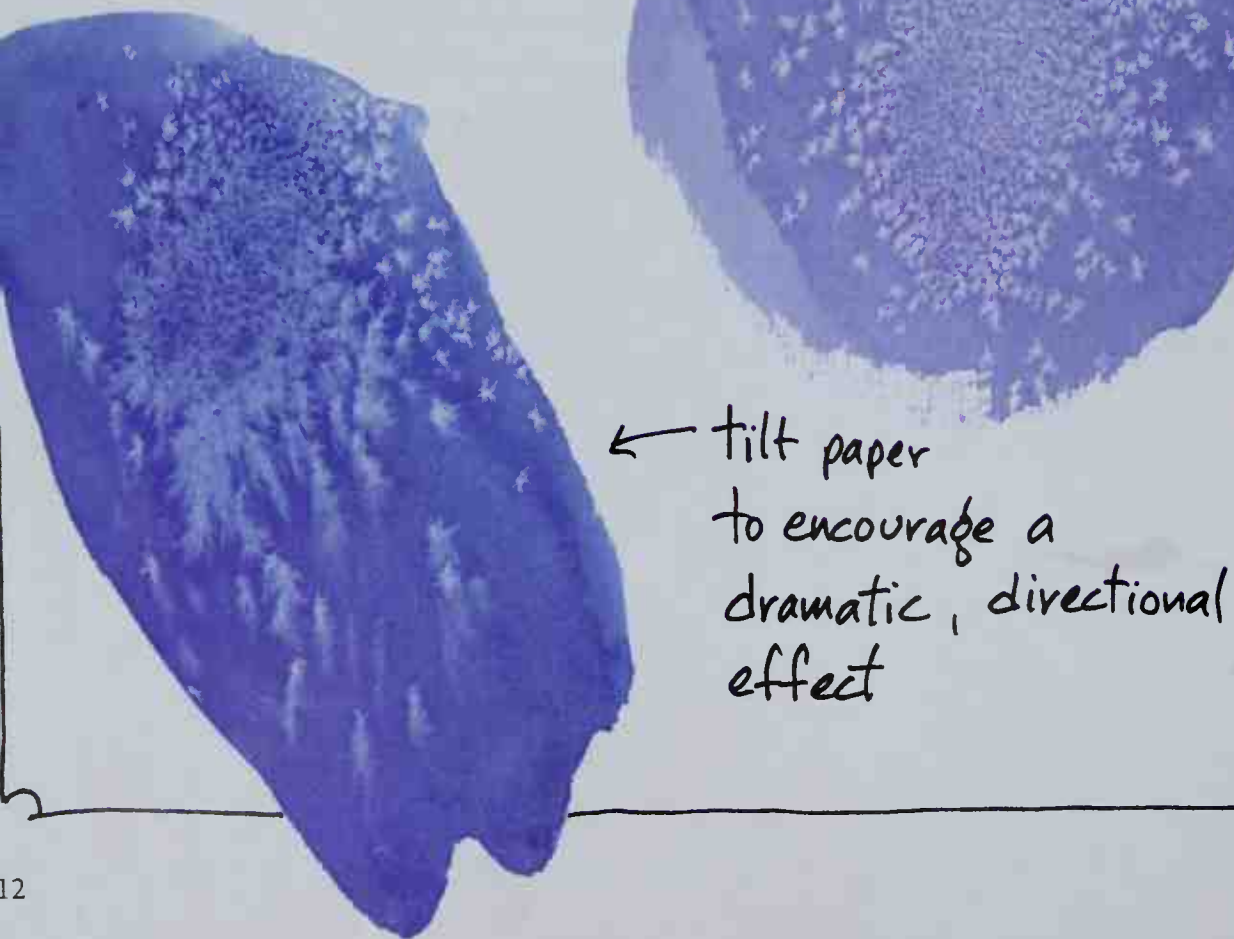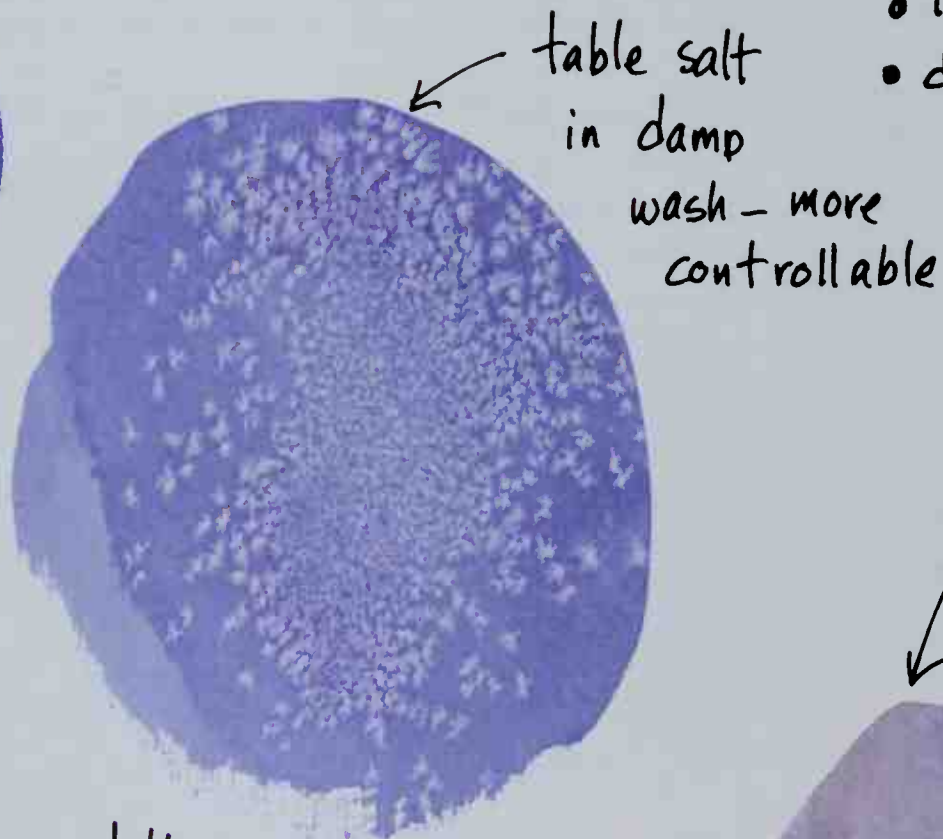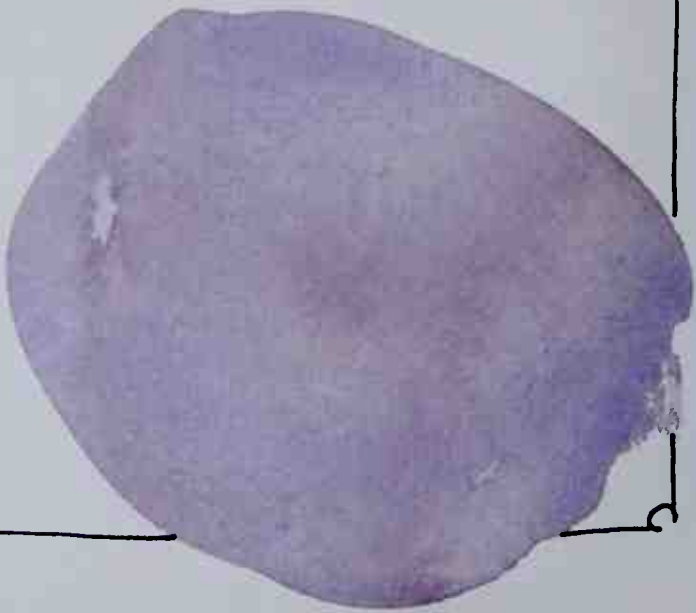
table salt in
dry wash - no
effect

← tilt paper
to encourage a
dramatic, directional
effect

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SCRAPING

- In a wet wash, scraping (here with the end of my brush) makes dark lines. The paper surface is

⟨ ↓

bruised, making it absorb more pigment.

here, the wash had begun to dry.

you can even drag pigment out of the wash for a linear effect.
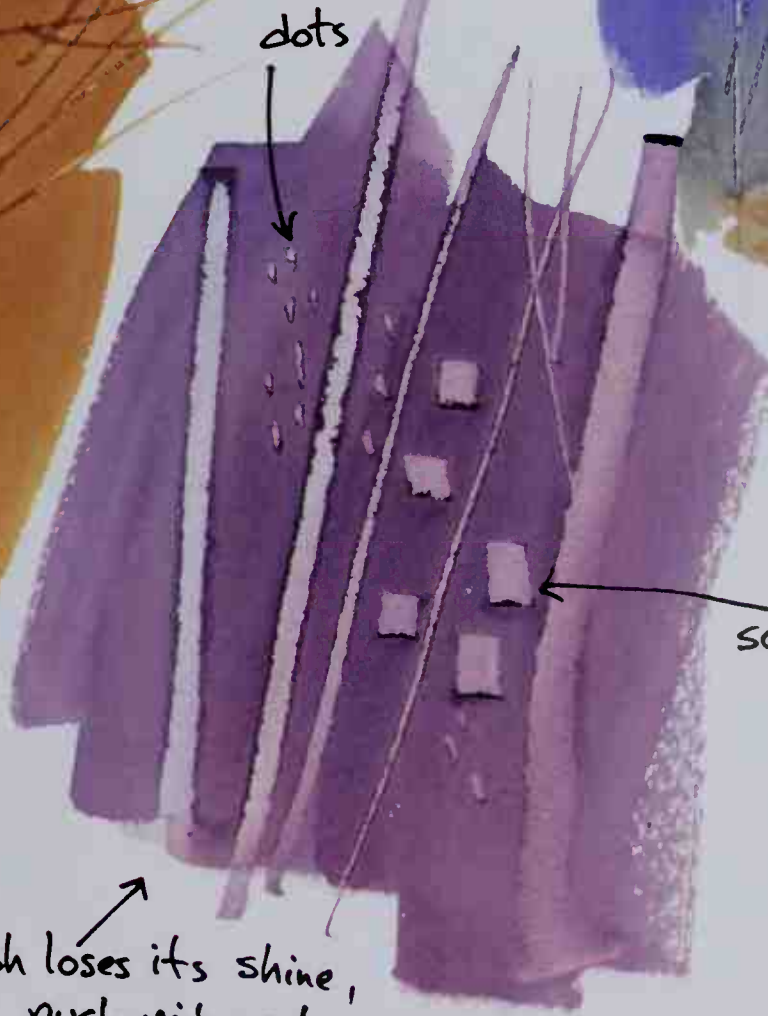
dots

fingernail

ruler
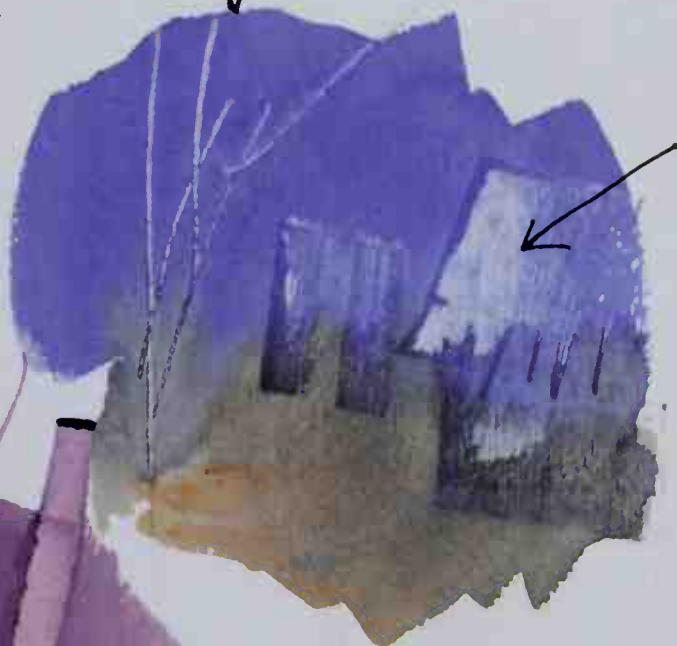
squares

- You can use a variety of tools — from cut-up credit cards to plastic rulers to your own fingernails

- When the wash loses its shine, scraped lines push pigment out of the way, making <u>lighter</u> lines, dots, squares — what have you.

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SPONGES

natural sea sponges
manmade

lift with sponge
and clear water

Keep turning
natural
sponges to
find interesting
new surface
patterns

print or
stamp with
sponge
filled with
pigment

manmade sponge
has mechanical
effect

vary application
for a linearfeel

overprint into
damp wash for
soft effects

directional spatter - hold brush at
an acute angle to paper

- negative
- positive

clear water into a damp
wash creates
"negative
spatter"

too much
creates
backruns,
"flowers" or
puddles

wet-in-wet
"positive" spatter

Spatter on dry paper
for a more hard-
edged effect.

blot here and
there for
variation

clear water
from sprayer makes a
lacy edge

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WATER TEXTURES

One of the first things that students invariably ask is "How do I paint water?" It's a tricky subject, as fluid as the water itself, but it doesn't have to be. It follows the same simple rules as painting anything else—observation, logic and application, with a dash of adventure thrown in to season the pot. If you so choose, you can use traditional layering techniques to make this liquid subject much easier to handle; a simple step-by-step approach with drying time between steps can tame even the most turbulent white water. So let's "get our feet wet" and jump right in. The water's fine (and not nearly as daunting as it may seem).

In this chapter we'll cover still, reflective water—a matter of suggesting the glassy surface and adding reflections; moving water, with its appearance dictated by the direction of the water's flow; choppy water, with its randomly broken surface textures; white water; and waterfalls. Armed with these suggestions, you should be able to tackle just about any situation that presents itself—or find a way to do it on your own. My examples are intended mainly to remove some of the mystery and to give you suggestions, not as hard-and-fast rules.

Heron Lake 15" × 22"

wet-in-wet
under wash
(dampen paper
first if you like)

slight
lift with
edge of
brush
dampened
with clear
water

while this
wash is still
glossy but not
soaked, add
reflections
and other
details

STILL, REFLECTIVE
WATER

show reflections here

scratch through dry wash with sharp craft-knife blade to suggest sparkle of light
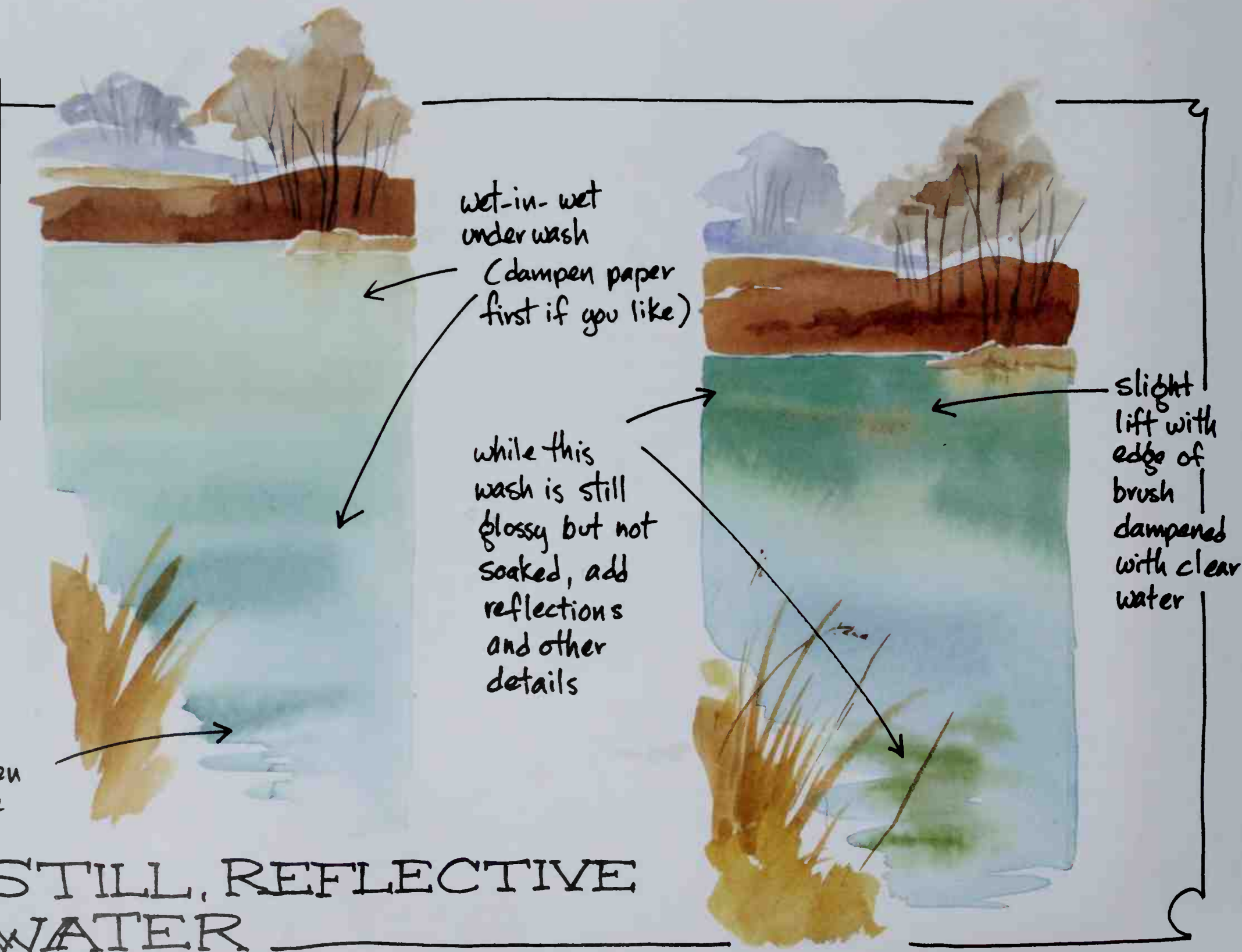
finish by adding as much or as little detail as you like in the form of reflections, sparkle, jumping fish

lay in darker reflections and directional lines in water

reflections are mirror images - the same approximate angle as their object but lighter or darker, backwards, + upside down

up close, reflections may become broken even with little or no wind

paint in primary
reflecting objects first

reflection
lighter than
ter, draw it
then mask —
y attention to
rection of flow

moving
water makes
reflections
waver

begin adding
details, paint
in color desired

MOVING
REFLECTIONS

scraped lines
add sparkle

darker lines
reinforce flow
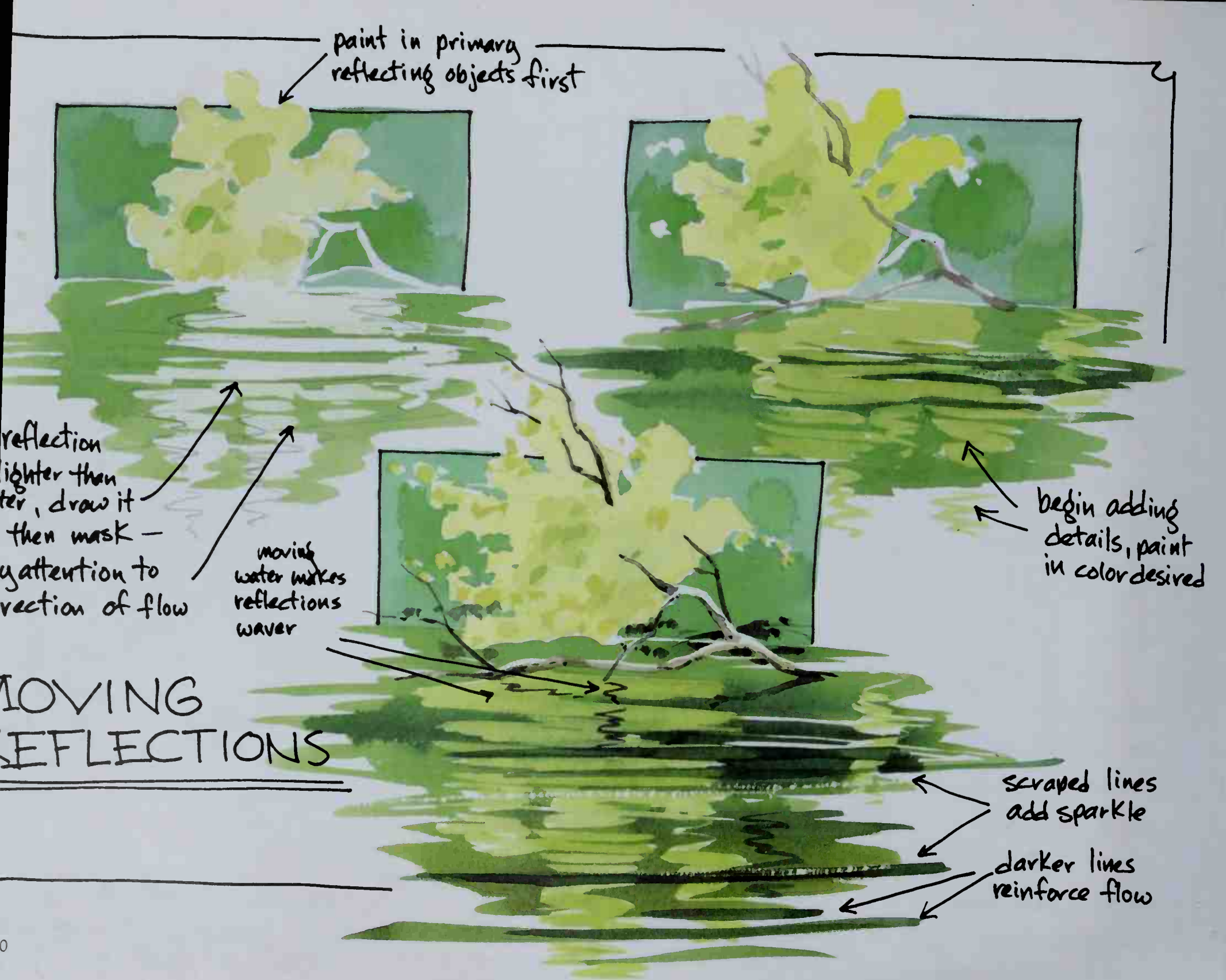
simple
pattern in
background

distant
wave
lines

begin
adding detail
to describe
wave action
with darker,
smaller washes

lay in initial washes,
paying attention to
the movement and
underlying cause

darker
roll line

soft
edges

add small details

CHOPPY WATER
OR WAVES (lake, ocean)
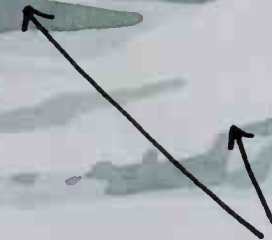
Water/whitewater

- varies widely in texture and color from <u>true</u> white to quite dark
- warmer in shallows

darker

very white

lighter water

good place for drybrush work

~~ken~~ lines suggest ~~e~~ action

spatter for sparkle

warmer color suggests bottom showing through
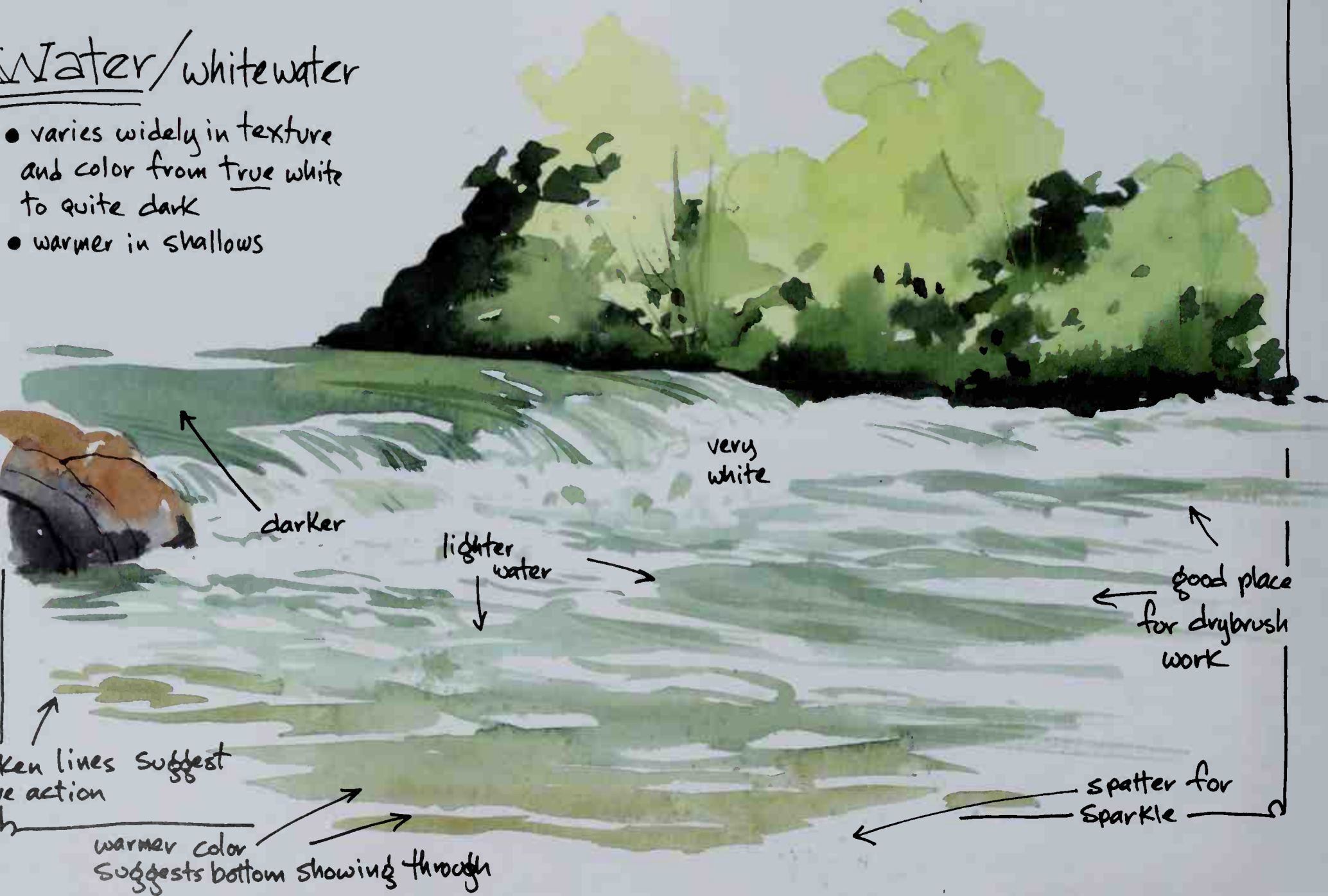
light-struck, white water

shadowed, cool

broken, falling water

darker

soft foam

direction of water

pay attention to cause and effect — why does the water move the way (and direction) it does, what that does to texture, color and direction

a combination of wet and dry techniques works best to capture falling water

Water / waterfall
- can look white, if moving rapidly (lots of air mixed in)
- cool in shadows

FOLIAGE

Did you ever notice how much of landscape is made up of foliage? Trees, bushes, shrubs — they all have leaves (or needles) at most seasons of the year. Unless you are painting a seascape, you're going to face the question of just *how* you want to handle this challenge — even in the desert there is the low-growing foliage of creosote and rabbit bush. Then there's the question of distance: If the foliage you paint is in the background, you'll simplify elements, just hinting at texture; if it's the stuff of your foreground, you'll want to pay close attention to how individual leaf shapes affect the overall results. Middle ground foliage is a compromise of suggested detail and simplified texture.

There are a number of ways to approach the subject — wet-in-wet, scumbling, drybrush details. Try a natural sponge to lay in the leafy forms, constantly turning the sponge to vary the surface you touch to your paper. Or spatter the pigment through a hand-torn stencil; if you prefer, just direct it carefully from a stiff brush. I prefer an inexpensive stencil brush, but an old oil-painting bristle brush works as well.

As the seasons change, so does your challenge. The sparse young leaves of early spring may be handled in one way (spatter? drybrush?), the full-blown, lusty foliage of July in another. Deciduous trees that lose their foliage look one way; evergreen another. Try out these techniques, or mix and match to best fit the situation you find yourself in.

Remember what you're looking at: hundreds of thousands of individual leaves on each tree — millions, perhaps. There's no way to paint each one, so you're free to take off from there and experiment to capture the *feeling* of foliage.

Cooley Lake House 15" × 22"
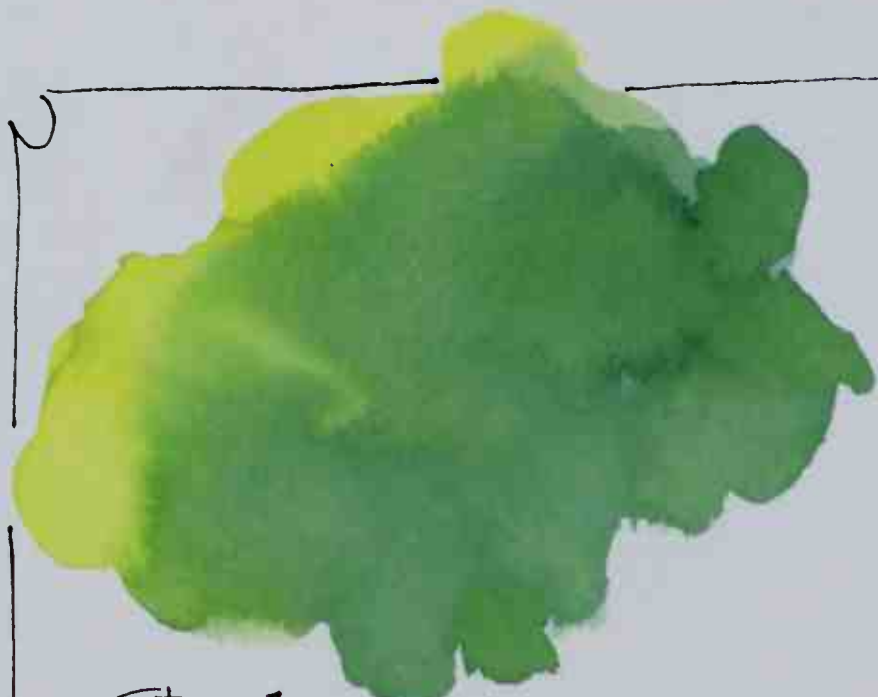
Step 1... Scumble in a
loose, interesting shape.
Let one side be
light - struck.

Step 2... Let step one
dry thoroughly. Add
loose, leafy shadows.

leafy
edges

FOLIAGE
(Scumbling)

spatter

Step 3... Finish with darkest
accents. Paint some loose,
leafy shapes around the edges.
Spatter can suggest foliage.

Step 1...
Wet paper and allow
to dry slightly - lay in
colors, using a light,
bright one on light-
struck side

Step 2... while still
wet, lay in dark
shadow area

Step 3... put in leaves +
details added with
quick, single brush
strokes

FOLIAGE
(Wet-in-wet)

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lots of variation

Step 1... wet sponge in
pigment, using your
lightest color

Spattered foliage works well,
too, either freehand or
directed through a torn mask
or stencil. Use alone or in
additionto
other
methods.

Step 2... mix plenty of
medium-value pigment &
develop shape, turning
sponge for variety

OLIAGE

atural Sponge)

Step 3... use a strong, rich
hue for shadows, since the
color dilutes in the super-
absorbent sponge

Shrubs

- wild or domestic
- rough or smoothly pruned
- evergreen or deciduous

CATHY JOHNSON

DOMESTIC

play of
light and
shade

fruits, if any

like a
small
tree

limbs
show in
shadowed
areas

suggest
foliage on edges

bare
branches

smoother
shape

WILD SHRUB

many shrubs have
multiple trunks

short
trunk
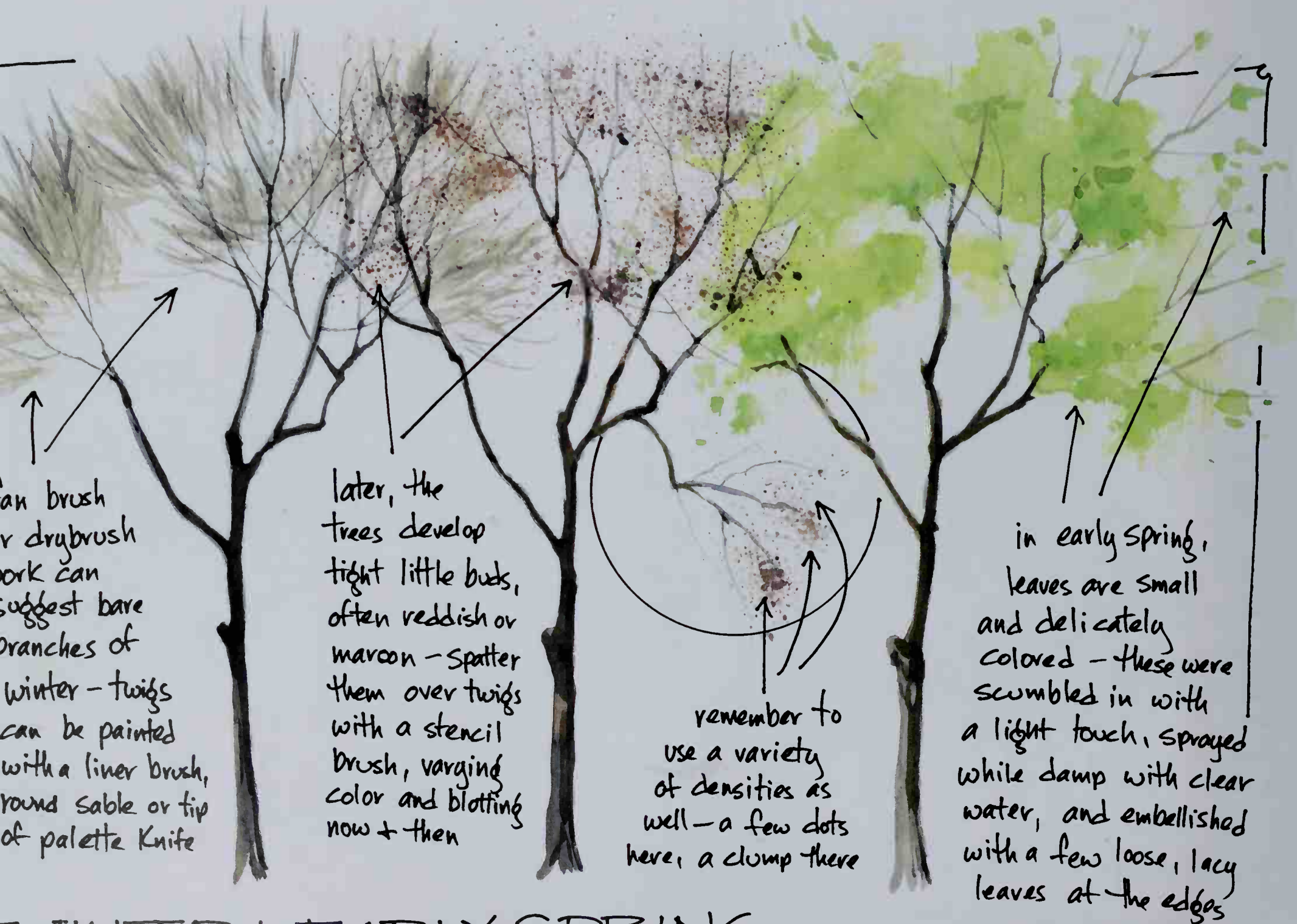
WINTER
SHRUBS

an brush
r drybrush
ork can
suggest bare
branches of
winter - twigs
can be painted
with a liner brush,
round sable or tip
of palette knife

later, the
trees develop
tight little buds,
often reddish or
maroon - spatter
them over twigs
with a stencil
brush, varging
color and blotting
now + then

remember to
use a variety
of densities as
well — a few dots
here, a clump there

in early spring,
leaves are small
and delicately
colored - these were
scumbled in with
a light touch, sprayed
while damp with clear
water, and embellished
with a few loose, lacy
leaves at the edges

WINTER to EARLY SPRING....

limbs show in
shadowed area

bare

dense, thick
canopy in full
summer – paint it
almost solid,
then add
shadows

loose leaves
at edges

in the fall,
the canopy
opens up as
leaves drop –
some trees have
nearly bare limbs
at the top or outer
edges, some keep
only top leaves.

variety
of leaves
can be
suggested by
the strokes
you use

SUMMER TO FALL

Elm

urn-shaped

graceful
curved

suggest
foliage

broken
outline

gnarled
limbs

"windows"

ned
nches

branches
show here &
there

Maple

often oval or
rounded

trunk,
limbs,
twigs progressively
smaller

Oak
ragged outline

strong
trunk

suggest
foliage

Trees: DECIDUOUS
• varied shapes
• rounded, urn-shaped,
  gnarled, upright

Poplar

Lombardy poplar
is tall, upright

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Trees
evergreens

emphasized differences in foliage color

suggest shadows

overall upward feeling

drooping branches

limbs hidden by thick needles

thick, bushy

suggest needles

open areas

shadowed

jack pine

weeping spruce

linear foliage

blue spruce

trunk is shadowed appears rounded

suggestion of bark

vary trunk colors for interest
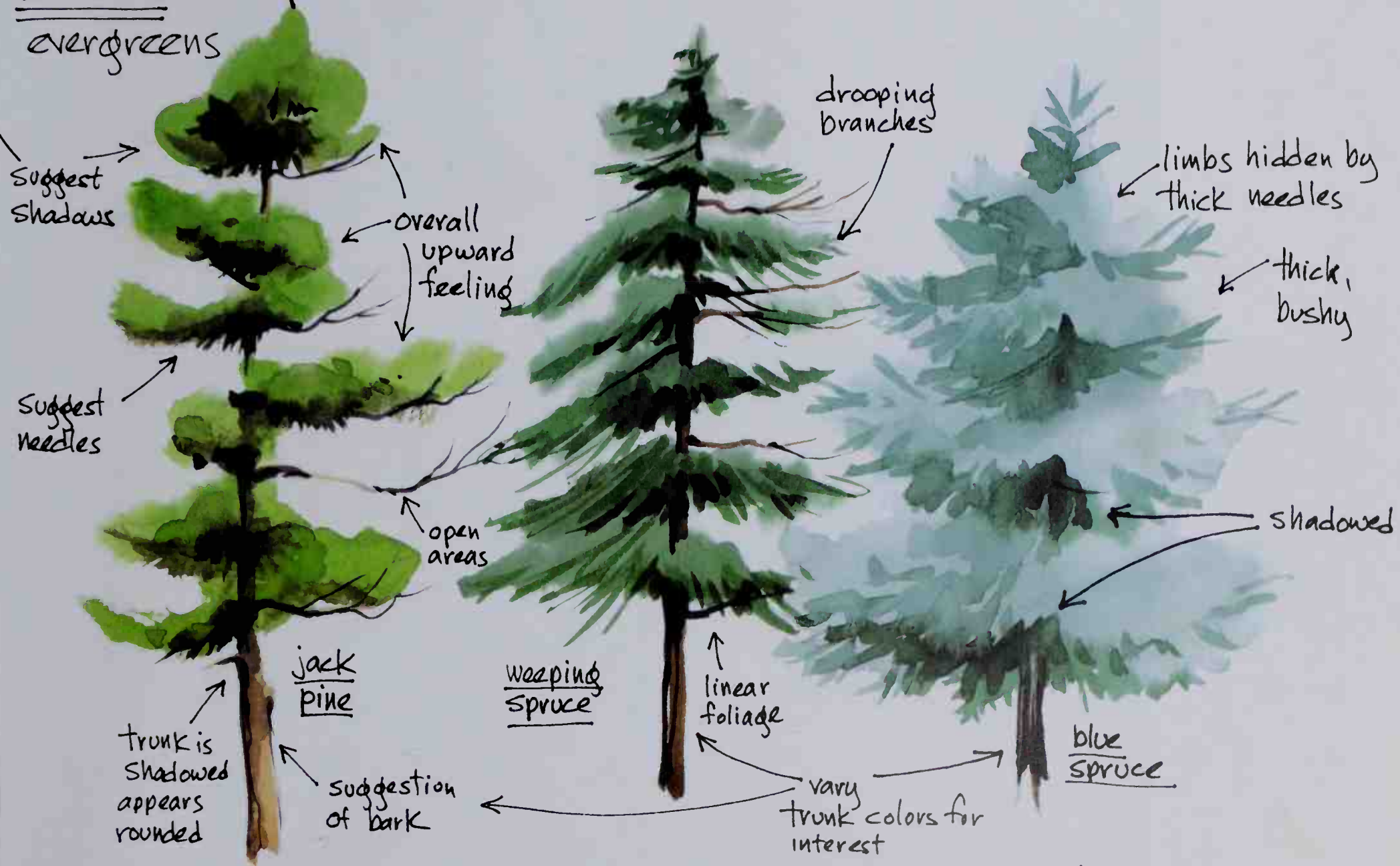
Notice variations in tree shapes — these are all evergreens

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TREE BARK

Painting trees is more than a matter of how you depict foliage, of course. Each species of tree has a unique and characteristic growth habit and a bark pattern devised to protect the tree from insect damage and the ravages of weather. This corky bark acts as insulation and armor.

From a distance, bark textures can be merely suggested — or ignored altogether if the trees are in the background. For those trees close enough to begin to differentiate themselves from the masses, a few lines added to the overall wash will be sufficient. But if you are working in close-up, bark patterns take on additional importance. They lend interest, believability and tactile sense. If your painting is based in realism, these bark textures become of paramount importance.

In this chapter, we will cover six of the most distinctive bark patterns: cottonwood, shagbark, birch, oak, sycamore and cedar. From these few, you'll find similarities to draw on — oak is not that different from walnut, paloverde has something in common with birch. We'll suggest ways to handle bark up close or at a distance and explore the possibilities of drybrush. With your own careful observations you'll be able to easily adapt the basic techniques to suit the situation.

Locust Gall 15" × 22"

scraping
through a damp
wash with a
brush handle

fine
brushwork

MIDDLE
DISTANCE
• as much detail
as you like

layered
washes

wet-in-
wet suggests
bark

simple, single
stroke, blotted
with a tissue

BACKGROUND
• very little
detail, if
any – could
use plain
wash

minimum
of detail
with
brush

FARTHER
AWAY –
• less detail
necessary

pigment
dropped into

spatter

TREE
BARK –
from a distance

Drybrush and detail
works well to describe
tree bark up close - use a
variety of techniques

TREE
BARK -
close - up

begin to
add detail
with an almost
dry brush

pigment
dropped in
underwash to
suggest moss
and lichen

variable
underwash

drybrush, small
washes

add darker,
dry strokes

spatter

open, broken
strokes

— shade for roundness —

- may be rough or smooth
- cool or warm-colored
- vertical or horizontal

re
ail

less detail
gives a
light-struck
effect

rough,
shaggy
texture

roughly
horizontal
striations

Shadow

cast shadow

Cottonwood

curves
give a
sense of
roundness

Birch

warm

Shagbark
Hickory

ool

color
variations
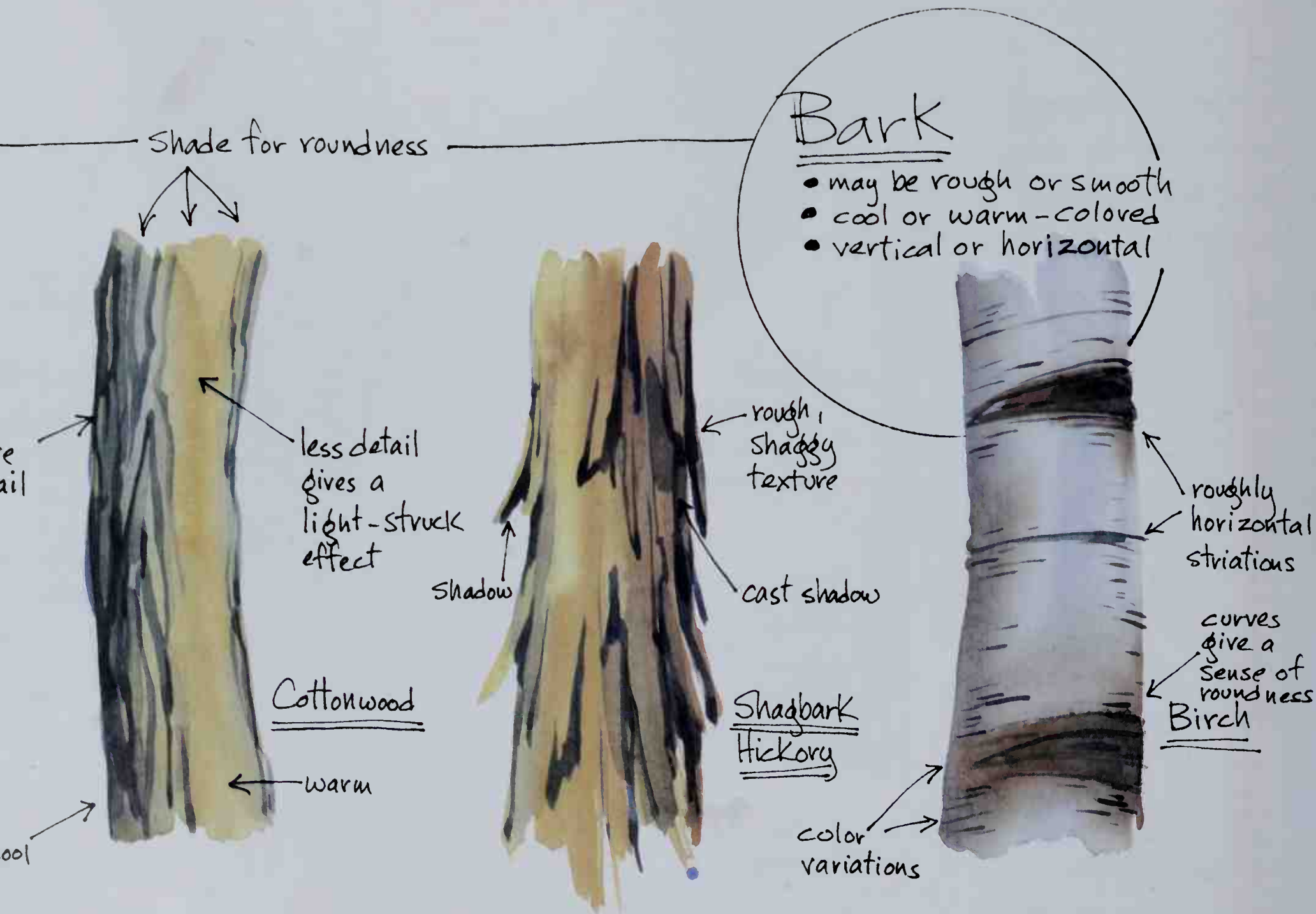
Observe tree-bark textures

38

Oak
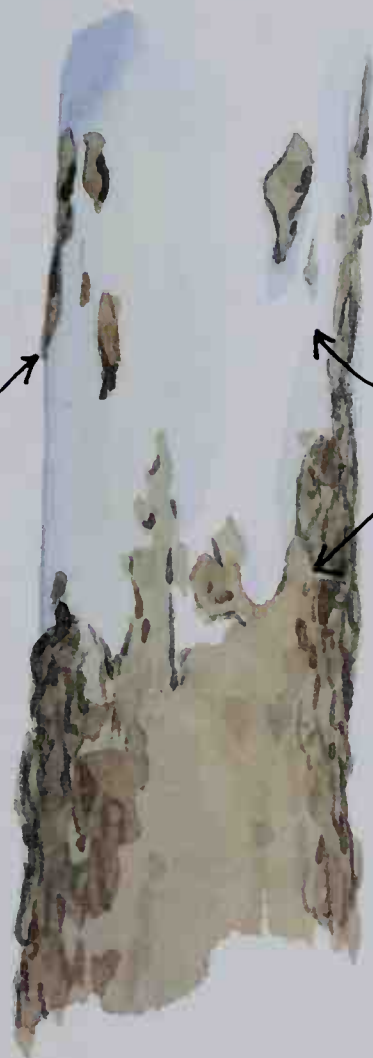
more or less detail
also suggests
roundness

bark con-
voluted,
tight

shield-
shaped
bark plates

above, bark is
smooth and
white

low on the
tree, bark is
brown, scaly

bark
flakes
away,
may be
loose

Sycamore

• Depending on the
kind of tree (and its age)
the bark may be rough,
smooth, flaky or
tight.

loose
strings

Cedar

sapsucker
holes

bark string
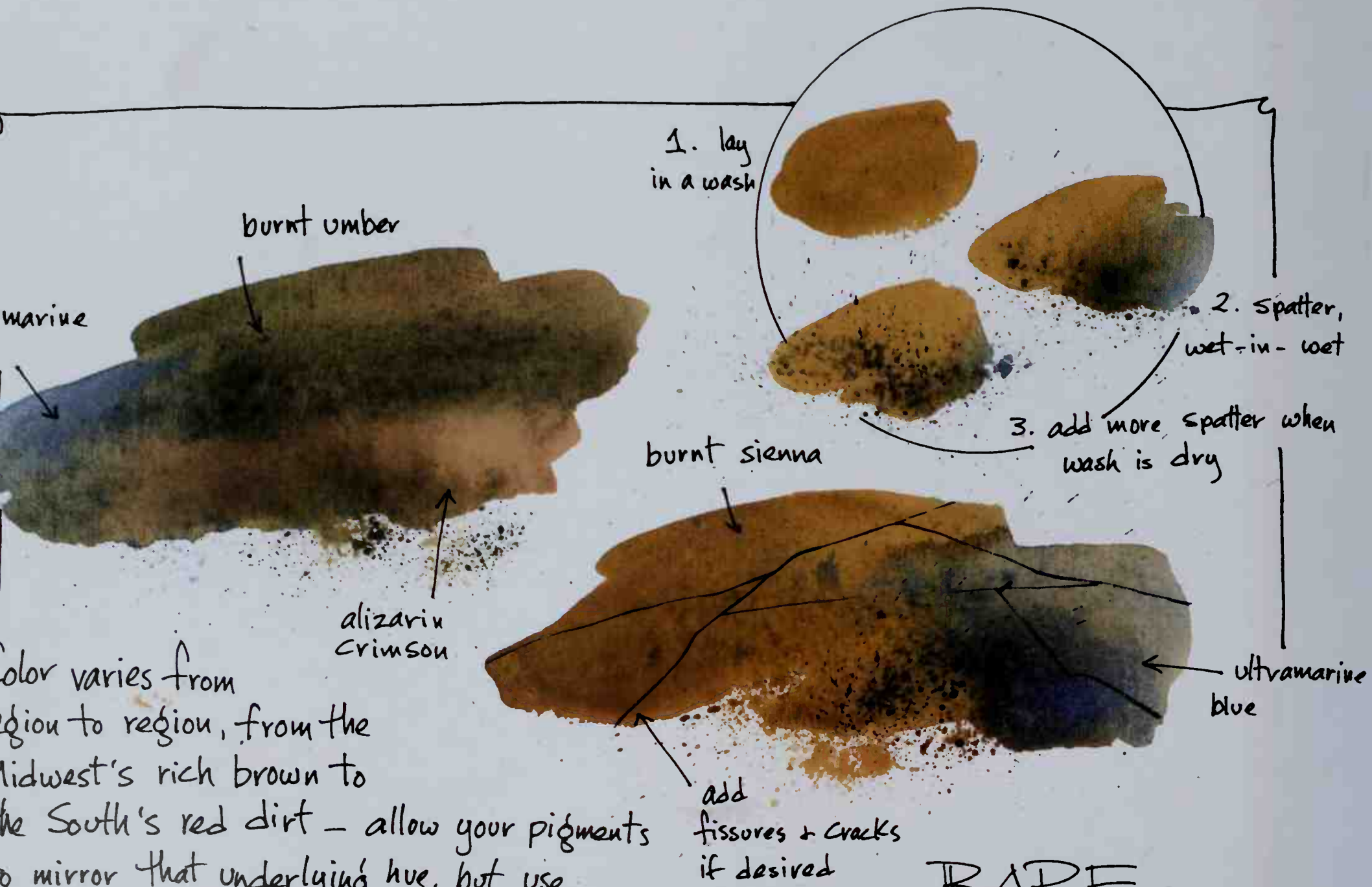pulled away,
revealing
warm color

EARTH, PEBBLES, SAND

The earth we stand on is too important to be ignored; how you choose to depict this resource can say much about the landscape you want to explore. Are you on a beach with sparkling white sand, in the South with its ruddy soil, or in the Midwest, with yard-deep glacial soils as rich and brown as chocolate? Has this once rich resource, on the other hand, eroded badly, faded with overuse or disappeared altogether? Do you want to suggest a sandy beach, a stubbly cornfield, a textural mixture of pebbles and dirt?

Oddly enough, foregrounds seem to be a stumbling block for many people. What kind of detail and how much are matters of much concern. In this chapter we will explore a number of ways of dealing with dirt — at a distance or up close, simplifying forms or adding as much detail as you like.

And although it may seem the obvious choice to use an earth color (burnt umber, raw umber, burnt sienna, raw sienna, yellow ochre) to paint the earth, remember to vary the flat, opaque pigment with color: subtle blue shadows, a rosy tinge in the sun, a sparkle of sand. Because even if the overall hue is one of the browns, the liveliness of this resource underfoot can be suggested with color to make a more interesting painting. Add these variations wet-in-wet or come back when dry with transparent glazes and your foregrounds will no longer trouble you; you'll direct the eye to an area as simple or as complex as you like; *you're* in control.

Dry Fork, Fishing River 22" × 30"

burnt umber

marine

1. lay
in a wash

2. spatter,
wet-in-wet

3. add more spatter when
wash is dry

burnt sienna

alizarin
Crimson

color varies from
region to region, from the
Midwest's rich brown to
the South's red dirt — allow your pigments
to mirror that underlying hue, but use
variety, as well — reds, blues, etc.

add
fissures + cracks
if desired

ultramarine
blue

BARE
EARTH

ROCKY EARTH OR GRAVEL

Step 1 — lay in a wash — color and value vary according to need.

Step 2 — while still wet, spatter with a variety of pigments.

burnt umber

Cadmium orange

burnt sienna

cobalt

Step 3 — scrape a few light-struck rocks; suggest rock shapes with a dark value (foreground) and touch them with various colors.

spatter when dry for further texture; blot some for variety.

lines to suggest rocks

give rocks some color

43

no detail, cooler color

...member that you can see
... and sharper details
...ser in the picture
...ue; near rocks and
...bles can be
...eloped as
... as you
...sh

very
little detail,
sandy
color

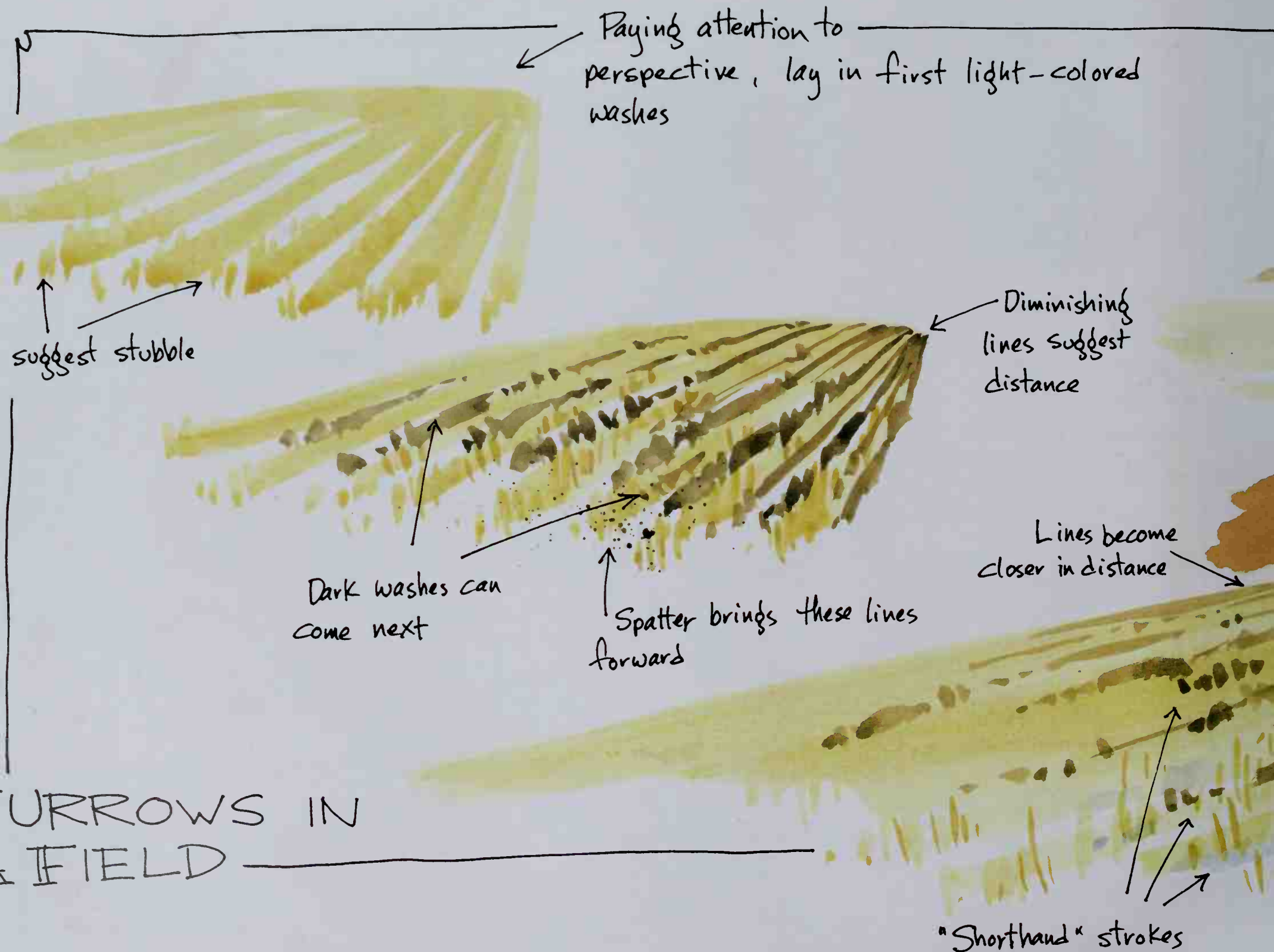scrape through
damp wash to lift
light side of
pebbles

wet-in-wet
spatter with clear
water

wet and
dry spatter

SANDY-TO-
PEBBLY BEACH

44

Notice the cause of
the erosion; trace its
beginnings

indicate
planes

Erosion often follows
a zig-zag course — notice the
"Z" above

rough, dry-
brush strokes
and suggested
detail

ERODED
GROUND

Paying attention to
perspective, lay in first light-colored
washes

suggest stubble

Diminishing
lines suggest
distance

Dark washes can
come next

Spatter brings these lines
forward

Lines become
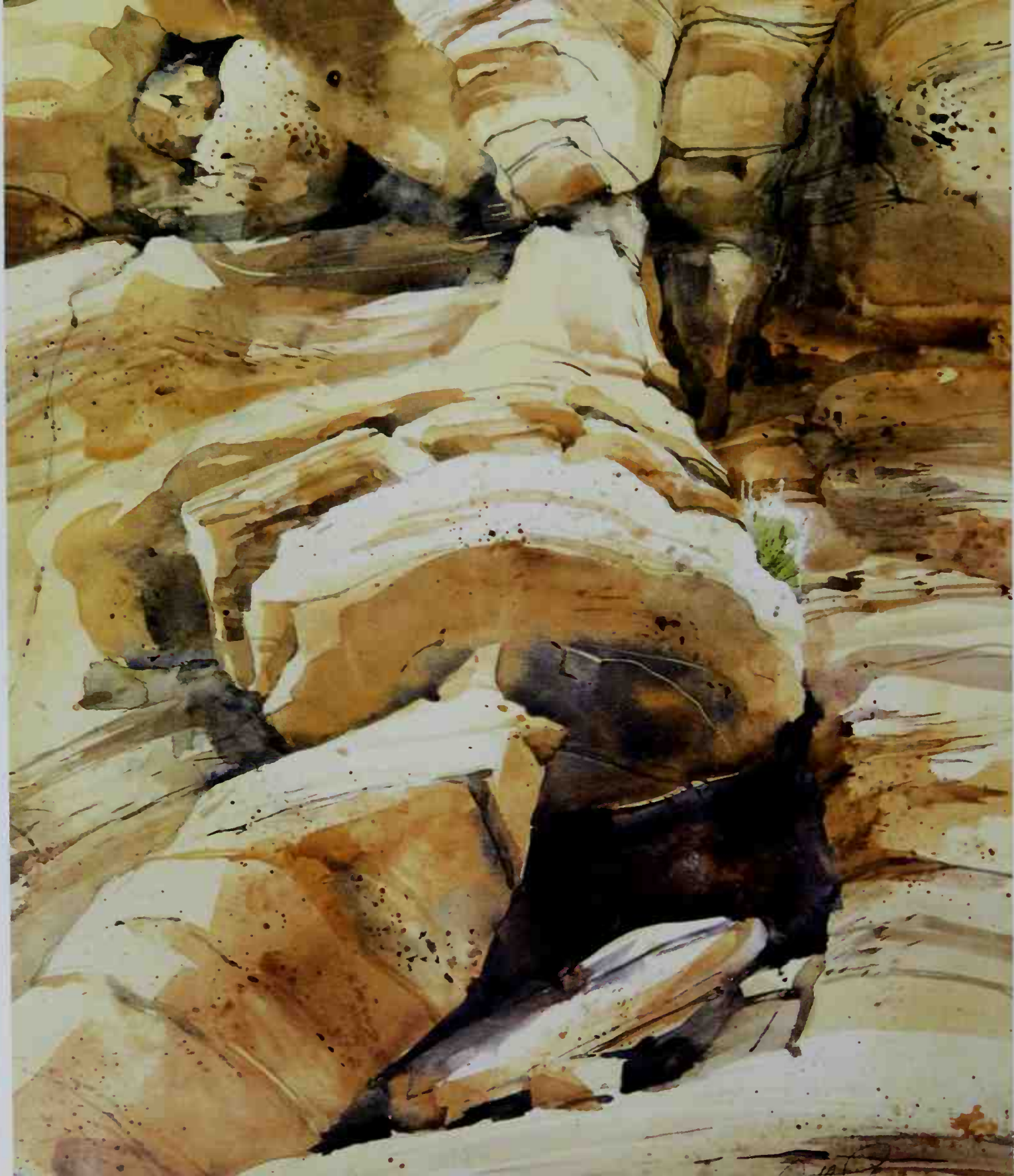closer in distance

URROWS IN
FIELD

"Shorthand" strokes

Almost no
detail

Cool
Shadows push this
area back

Blue shadows describe
form, suggest volume
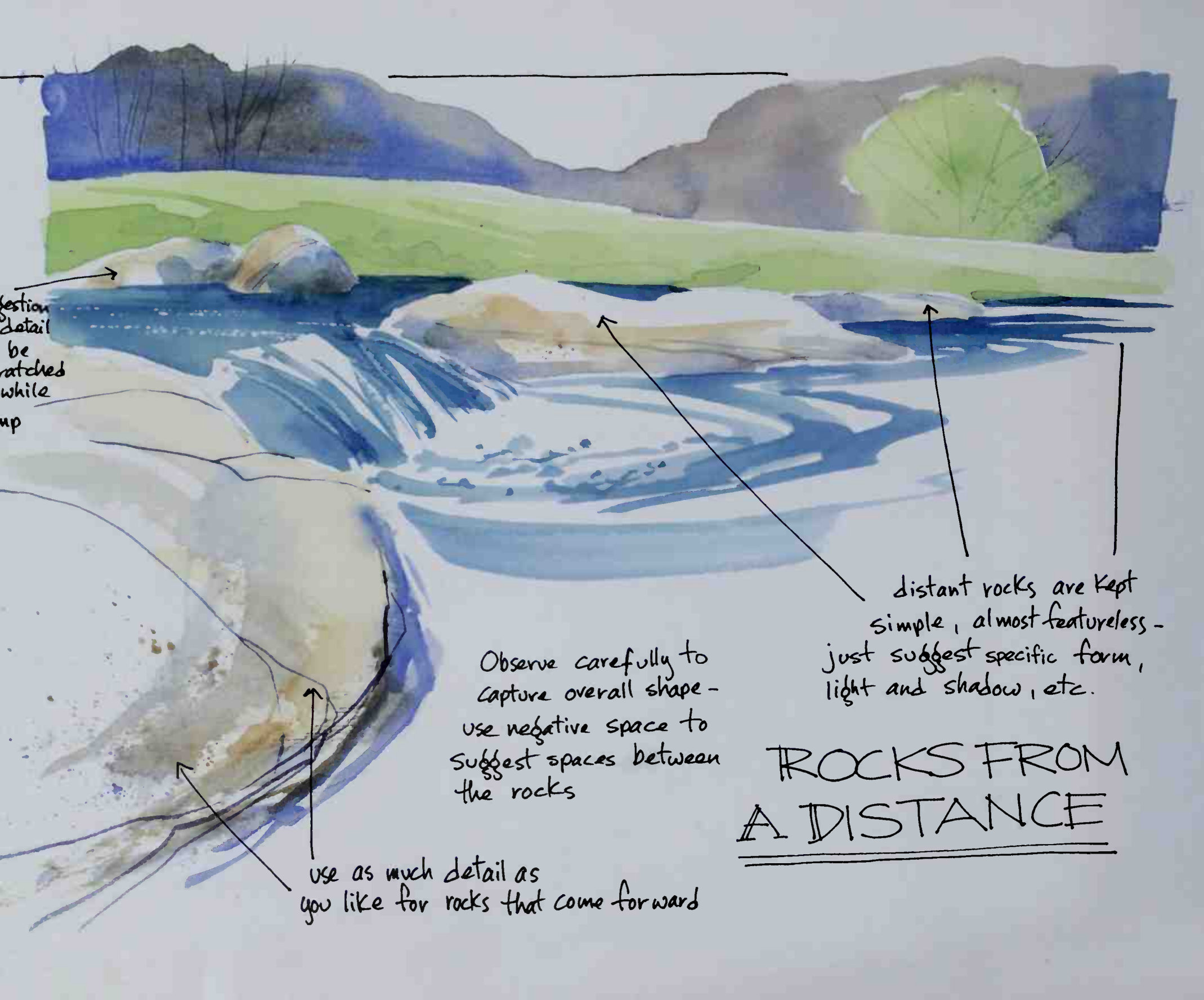
scratched
lines

Varied stubble

ROCKS

From a geologist's point of view, rocks are a wide-open subject—as many-colored as the rainbow, as richly textured as the sea. There are smooth rocks and rough rocks, rocks born in the liquid cauldron of a volcano or laid down over eons at the bottom of some prehistoric inland ocean. There are rocks sculpted by the wind or rounded by the patient action of water. There are rocks as pocked and punctuated as a sponge and rocks striated with delicate lines as fine as a feather's barbs. There are, in other words, as many forms and textures for the artist to explore as there are for the dedicated geologist—and as you can tell, this is one of my favorite subjects.

Capturing the varied forms of rocks, whether they are as faceted as a crystal or as voluptuously curved as a shoulder, is a constant challenge. It's necessary to pay attention not only to overall form but to the effects of light and shadow and how they help describe texture. But it's not as difficult as it sounds. Again, a logical approach can make even the most complex rock form easy to capture on paper: Look for the backbone of form first, *then* worry about detail.

Use color to give a sense of place—Nevada's redstone formations are very different from the pale, lichen-and-moss-painted limestone of northern Missouri, where I live. The Payne's gray rocks of coastal Maine—remnants of ancient volcanoes—and the pinkish glacial erratics of the upper Midwest are a pleasure to paint. Texture comes into play when colors are similar. The rugged, iron-stained limestone of the Missouri Ozarks is very different from the slick rocks of the Southwest's canyon lands, though both share a reddish hue.

And of course, we use rocks as a resource. Here, we've suggested several ways to depict the rock walls of an old building using the same principles, and thrown in a bit of brickwork while we're at it—these man-made "stones" may be more uniform than nature's rocks, but they can still challenge the artist.

Redstone 15″ × 22″

Jestion
detail
be
ratched
while
up

distant rocks are kept
simple, almost featureless -
just suggest specific form,
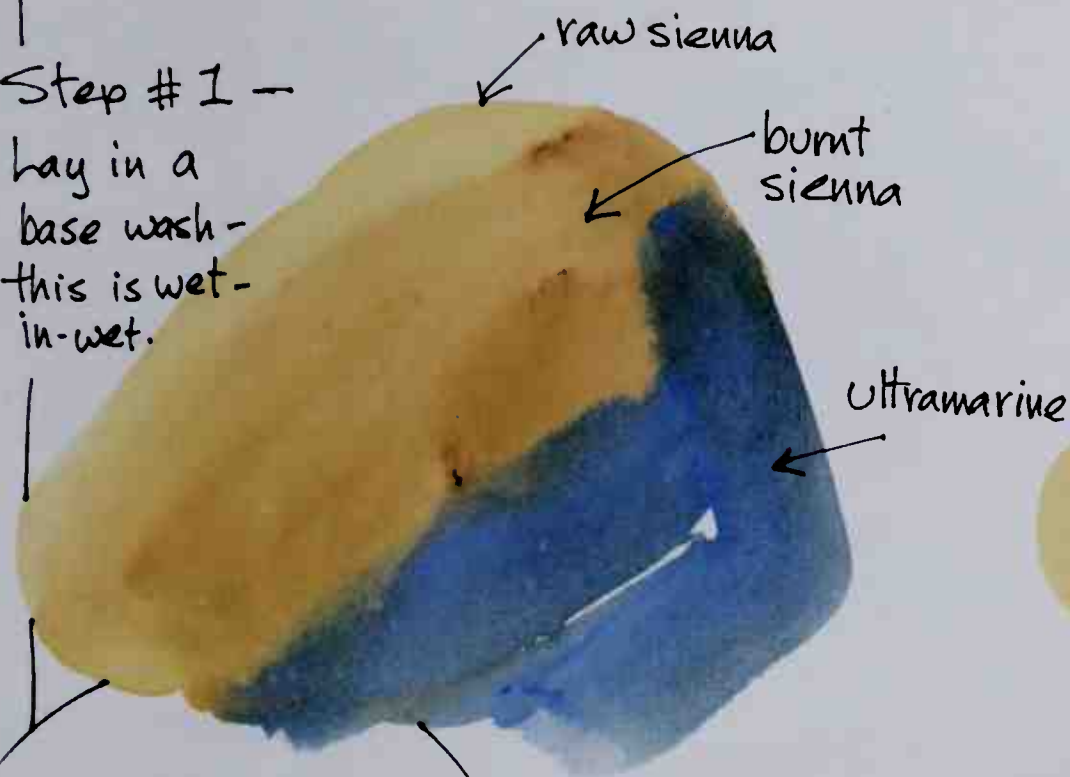light and shadow, etc.

Observe carefully to
capture overall shape -
use negative space to
suggest spaces between
the rocks

ROCKS FROM
A DISTANCE

use as much detail as
you like for rocks that come forward

• Step #1 — Lay in a base wash — this is wet-in-wet.

raw sienna

burnt sienna

Ultramarine

• Step #2 — While still damp, scrape and incise lines, high-lights. Positive & negative spatter work well.

incised lines — paper just damp.

scraped lines — paper wet

negative spatter.

BOULDERS or
ROCKS

• Particular texture depends on the type of rock
• Can use wet-in-wet, stamping, incising, spatter
• Keep colors lively

printing with tissue

Dark cracks

• Step #3 — Add cracks, texture with strong pigment. Positive spatter suggests a pitted surface. I used a bit of stamping or printing with a wad of tissue.

positive spatter

shadow - vary color

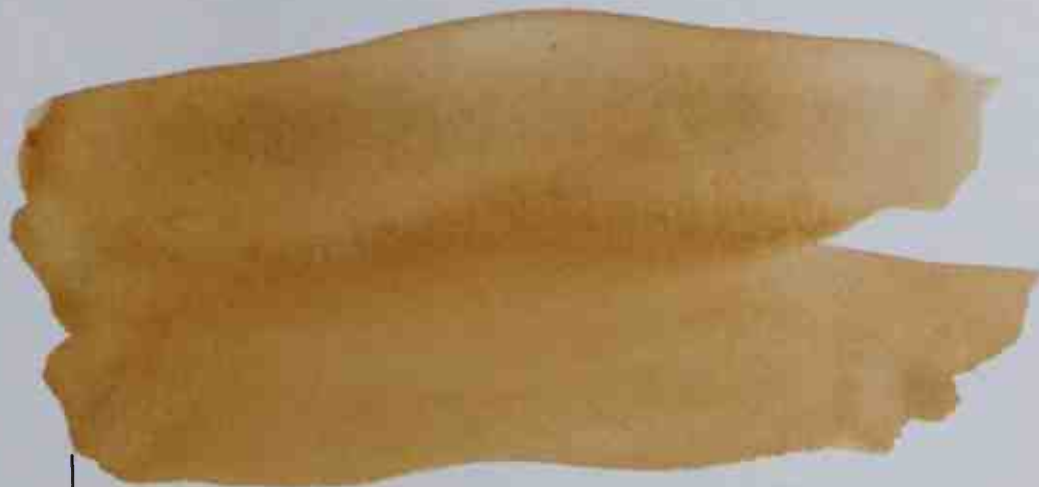#1 – Lay in a varied wash, paying attention to local color

VOLCANIC
DEPOSITS

#2 – Suggest form with shadows – begin to suggest flow lines

#3 – Develop details with fan brush, liner, or fine round red sable – vary color and add spatter

SANDSTONE

#1 Lay a warm base wash

#2 When dry, add spatter. Blot, here & there, and vary color.

#3 Add horizontal color striations, shadows, cracks + fissures + water stains.

LIMESTONE ROCKS

vary
color for
interest

#1 — Lay a base wash

suggest
moss

Spatter

#2 Paint cracks & fissures,
some wet-in-wet
Spatter

drybrush

#3 Add shadows,
using variations of warm &
cool for tension. More
spatter, more deep fissure
some dry brush

light underwash with individual bricks

A variety of texturing techniques

light wash with
rock shapes laid in

bricks/mortar
scratched in
while wash
is damp

rough
wash

brick
suggested

individual
rocks painted
in small, varied
washes, then textured
and "mortared"

Brickwork
is very similar
in basic handling

suggested
rock shapes
with some
drybrush
and
spatter

ROCK WALLS
or BUILDINGS

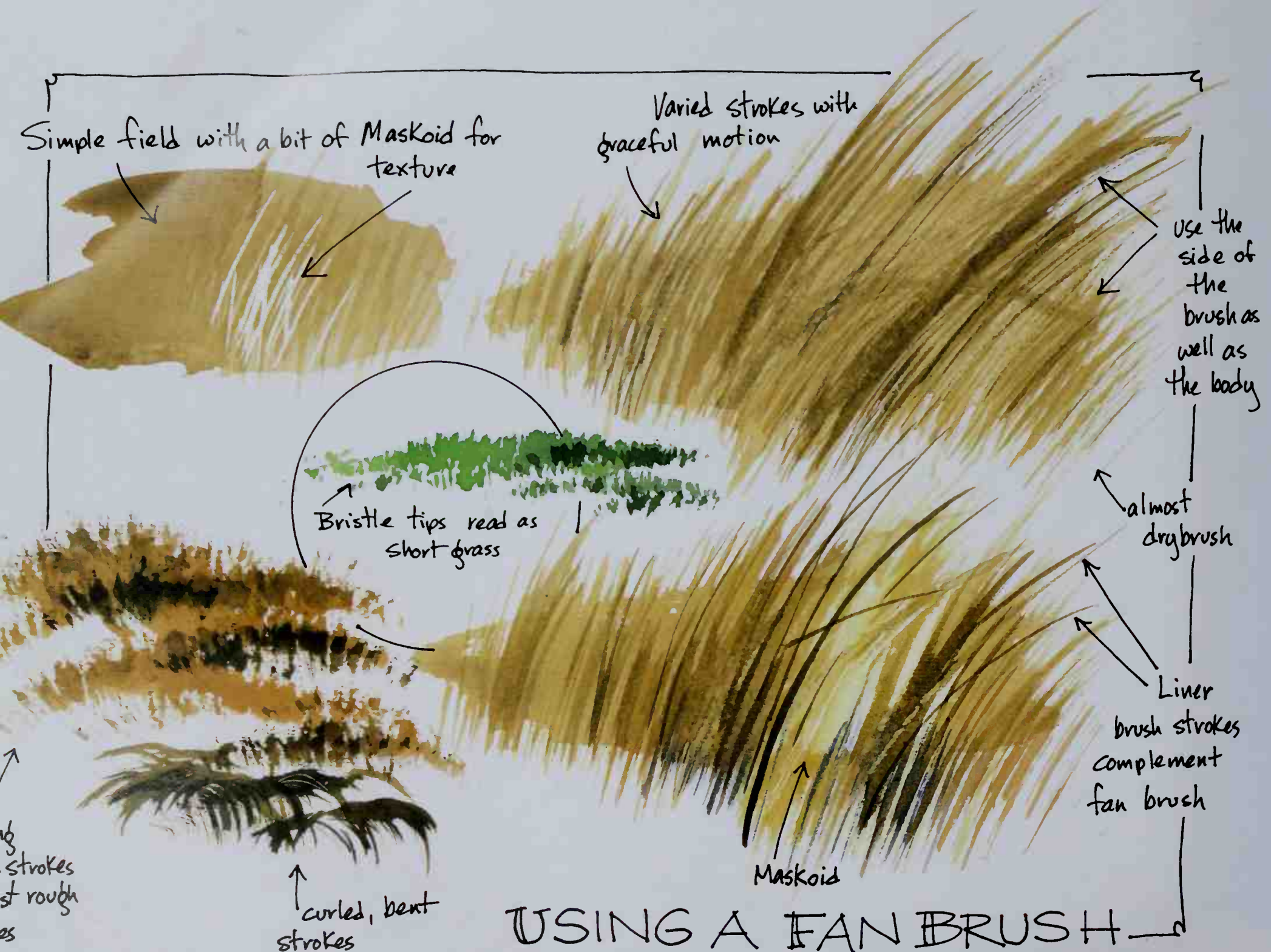textured under wash
with mortar lines laid in
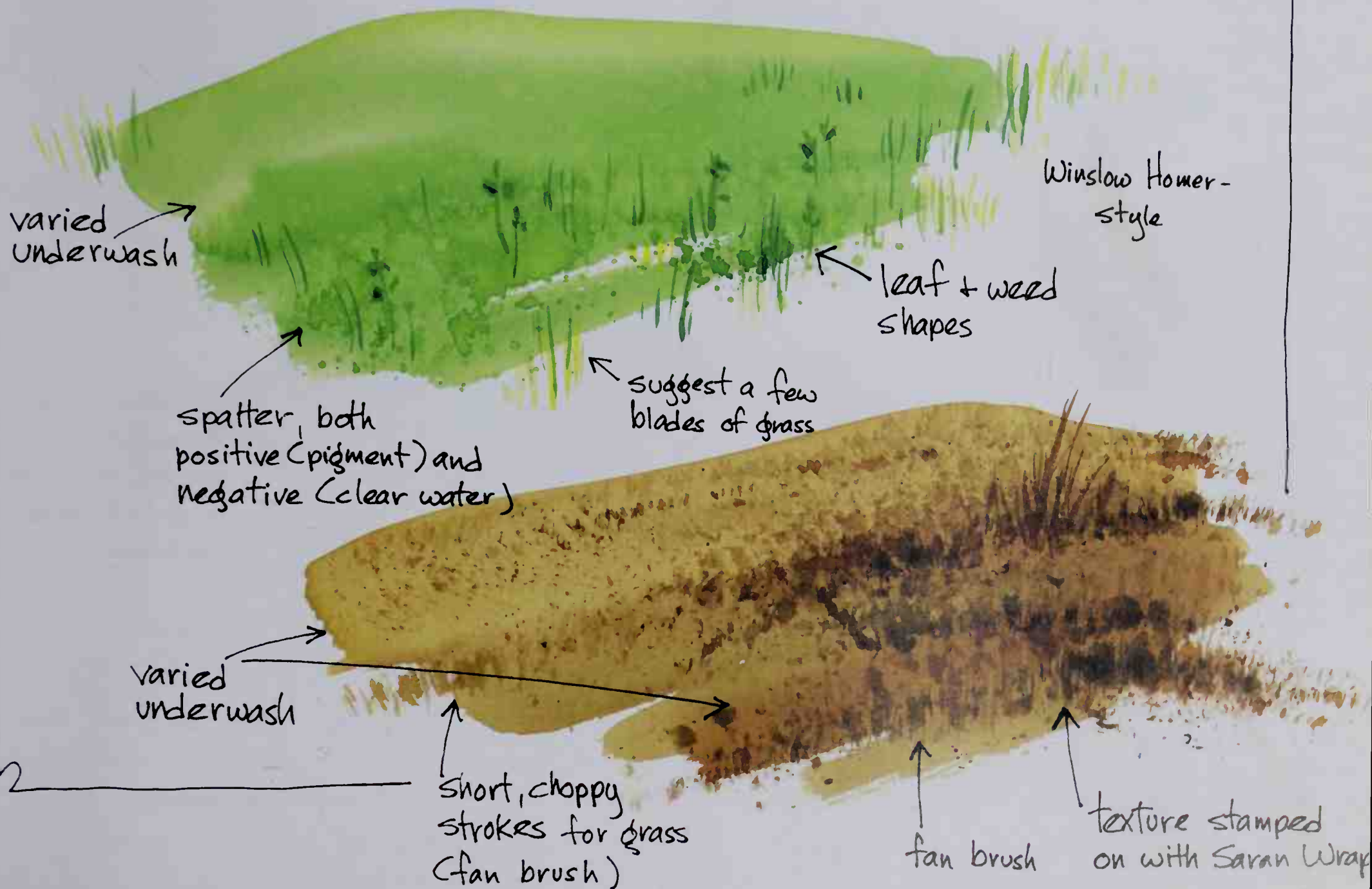
GRASSES AND WEEDS

From the manicured lawns of a proud old neighborhood to a field on its unkempt way to becoming a young forest, grasses and weeds provide texture and color underfoot. You can use as much or as little detail as you like to get your point across. In the distance, a well-kept lawn may be suggested by a simple, smooth wash of color; on the other hand, rough foreground weeds provide a woven tapestry of linear forms. It's a challenge, but not an insurmountable one.

A kaleidoscope of ways exists to suggest this richness. A fan brush can be manipulated to depict everything from a fine, smooth lawn to a rugged, windswept meadow. A sponge can add still more texture. You can even paint with a frayed bit of rope. Maskoid can keep some areas lighter for tonal variations, and spatter can suggest a multitude of forms. Wet-in-wet handling will give you softer shapes, suggesting distance; drybrush work brings detail into sharp focus.

Use directional strokes to direct the eye into the picture plane or make an "arrow" of a clump of grass; redirect with a few well-placed leaves. Try the Winslow Homer approach and embellish a smooth wash with a few individual blades. Unify foregrounds with these grassy textures. It's all in what you want to say and how much importance you want this area of your painting to claim.

Andy's Fawn 15" × 22"

Simple field with a bit of Maskoid for texture

Varied strokes with graceful motion

Use the side of the brush as well as the body

Bristle tips read as short grass

almost drybrush

Liner brush strokes complement fan brush

...g strokes ...st rough ...es

curled, bent strokes

Maskoid

USING A FAN BRUSH

GRASS - TWO VERSIONS

varied
underwash

Winslow Homer-
style

leaf + weed
shapes

suggest a few
blades of grass

spatter, both
positive (pigment) and
negative (clear water)

varied
underwash

short, choppy
strokes for grass
(fan brush)

fan brush

texture stamped
on with Saran Wrap

Lay in simple washes....

Begin to suggest texture while wash is damp with additional strokes...

wet-in-wet

Develop when thoroughly dry — at this distance, no details are visible

When dry, add a few blades or stalks for definition

Lay in shadow areas while damp — scratch through for individual stalks
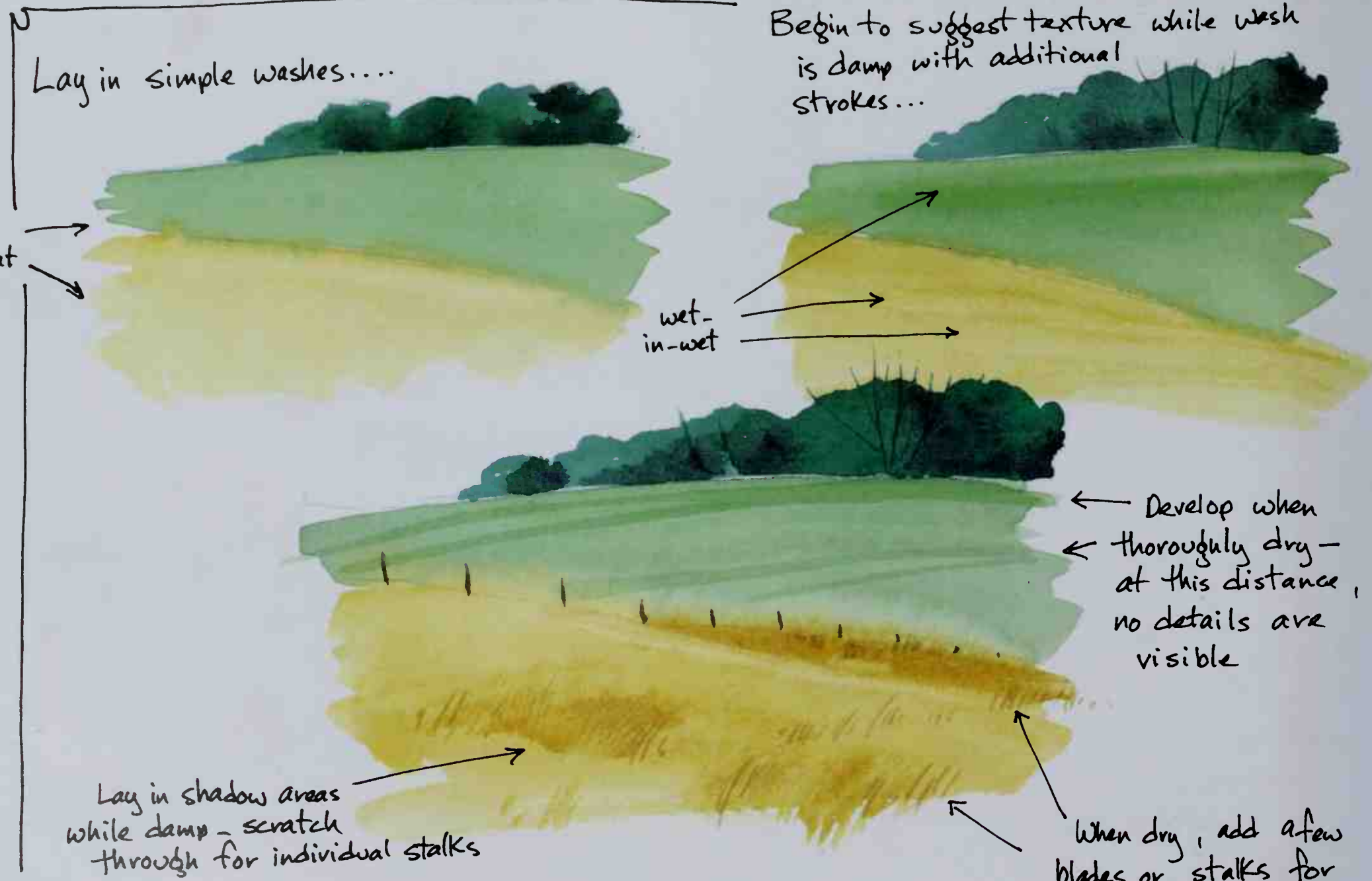
DISTANT GRASS

When working close-up, you can
go wild - if you like, zero in on a
single plant and explore
its varied textures.
Drybrush works
well here, and a
steady hand....

Add as much detail
as you like

MIDDLEGROUND

Maskoid applied with fan brush

Hit edge of
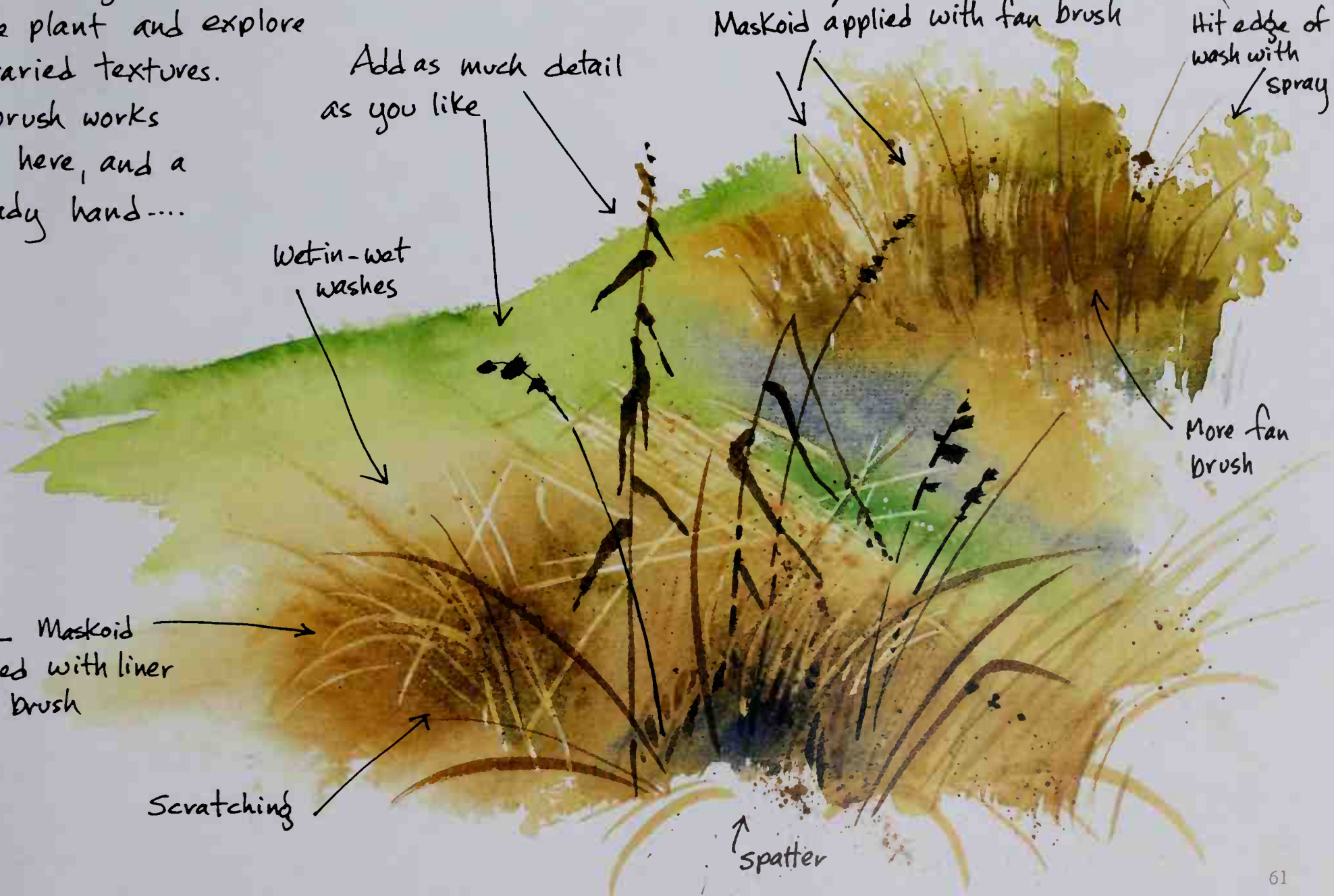wash with
spray

Wet-in-wet
washes

More fan
brush

Maskoid
applied with liner
brush

Scratching

spatter

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WEEDS AND TALL GRASS

- Vary colors and shapes
- Combine abstract + realistic forms

Step 1 — paint in a loose, shaggy form suggesting grasses

vary color and value

summer colors can be handled in the same way

Queen Anne's Lace

scraped into damp wash

Step 2 — suggest individual weeds by scraping through damp paint and scratching with a craft knife

scratched with sharp blade when wash is dry

dark twig

Step 3 — paint in a few realistic plant shapes, twigs, leaves, etc. Strengthen shadows if necessary.

Scrape through wash with craft knife

Maskoid helps preserve light-struck hay or straw

Distant haystacks or bales should be kept very simple

Soften edge to suggest strong light

Scratched-out lights

Soft edge here - lost + found

HAY or STRAW

Bales may be indented on the end - show shadows

Shadows and highlights suggest roundness

WEATHERED WOOD

Capturing the texture of old wood is one of the most satisfying tricks the watercolorist can pull off. When it's right, it conveys a sense of antiquity and perseverance — you suggest a mood as well as an object.

Whether your subject is an ancient fence post or the ornate, peeling trim on a fading Victorian house, you can choose how much or how little detail it will take to achieve your ends. It depends partly, of course, on distance. Close up you may wish to explore layer after layer of glaze and tiny detail in the exposed grain of the wood; at a distance, only a hint of such detail is necessary — or possible. It depends, too, on whether the wood is bare or painted — the effects of weather on these very different kinds of wood produce anything from deep grooves and a healthy crop of lichen to a kind of alligator crackling.

In most cases, a simple, varied underwash followed by additional glazing and a final layer of detail work will be sufficient. You can suggest light and shadow with that original wash or reserve that first step for local color only, coming back with a glaze to find your shadows.

Old fences have a special charm; there are so many kinds and styles and conditions, some indigenous to their geographical area, that you can suggest place with a simple architectural device. A white picket fence speaks of small-town Americana; a leaning slat fence feels like the Eastern seaboard. Weathered logs laid in the characteristic zigzag pattern of a rail fence is typically Southern or Midwestern.

Like all weathered wood, fences can be handled with a kind of creative logic. Ask yourself how much detail you need to get your point — or your mood — across. Ask yourself how to proceed from simple washes to glazes to detail, and then just do it!

Brunke's House 15" × 22"

TREE STUMP

Lay on as
many layers
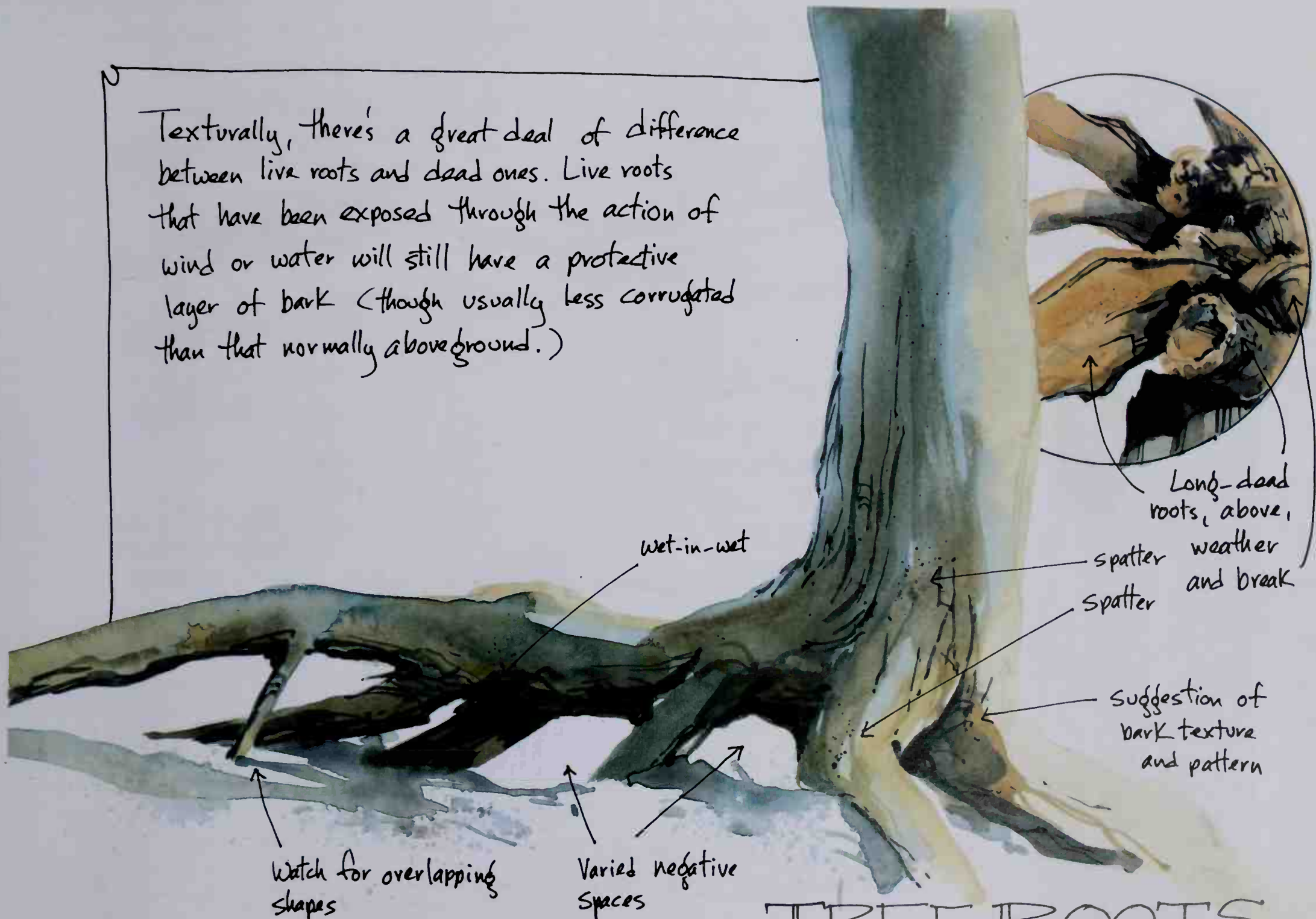as you like
for detail

— drybrush

— spatter

Viewed from
the end, logs (or stumps)
may show cut lines, growth
rings, differences between heart —
wood and outer layers — these are suggested with the same steps as above.

Step 1 — Preliminary wash
establishes local color

Step 2 — Add
color variations
while the first
wash is damp, then
complete
additional
modeling washes

Step 3 — Drybrush,
spatter or any other
texturing technique
can add depth and
definition

Texturally, there's a great deal of difference
between live roots and dead ones. Live roots
that have been exposed through the action of
wind or water will still have a protective
layer of bark (though usually less corrugated
than that normally aboveground.)

wet-in-wet

Long-dead
roots, above,
weather
and break

spatter

Spatter

Suggestion of
bark texture
and pattern

Watch for overlapping
shapes

Varied negative
spaces

TREE ROOTS

There are almost as many kinds of fencing material as there are methods of building them — as there are people to build them, for that matter. Each material weathers differently, and the distance from your eye to the fence affects texture

This old rail fence is very weathered, but at this distance it's enough to just suggest shadows and shapes

Close-up, this becomes almost a portrait of a fence post. Texture was suggested with preliminary washes, some wet-in-wet; drybrush and detail work with a fine sable brush, and with scumbling, spatter and finger-painting
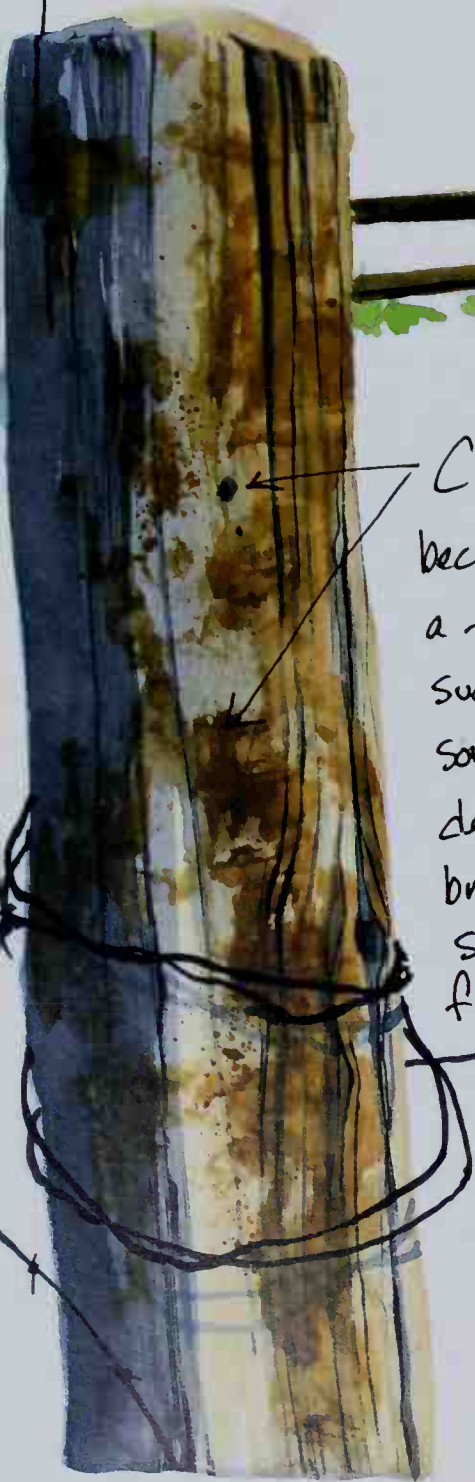
An old drift fence looks right with single strokes

WEATHERED FENCING

Cedar post - and - rail fence
shows texturing effects of
scraping

drybrush

Close up, this some-
what ornate picket fence
shows a variety of
techniques:
● Wet-in-wet
● Drybrush
● Glazing
● Spatter

Here the drift
fence changes
color, wet-in-
wet

Maskoid turned the drift
fence into an old white picket fence

WEATHERED WOOD:

OLD SIDING
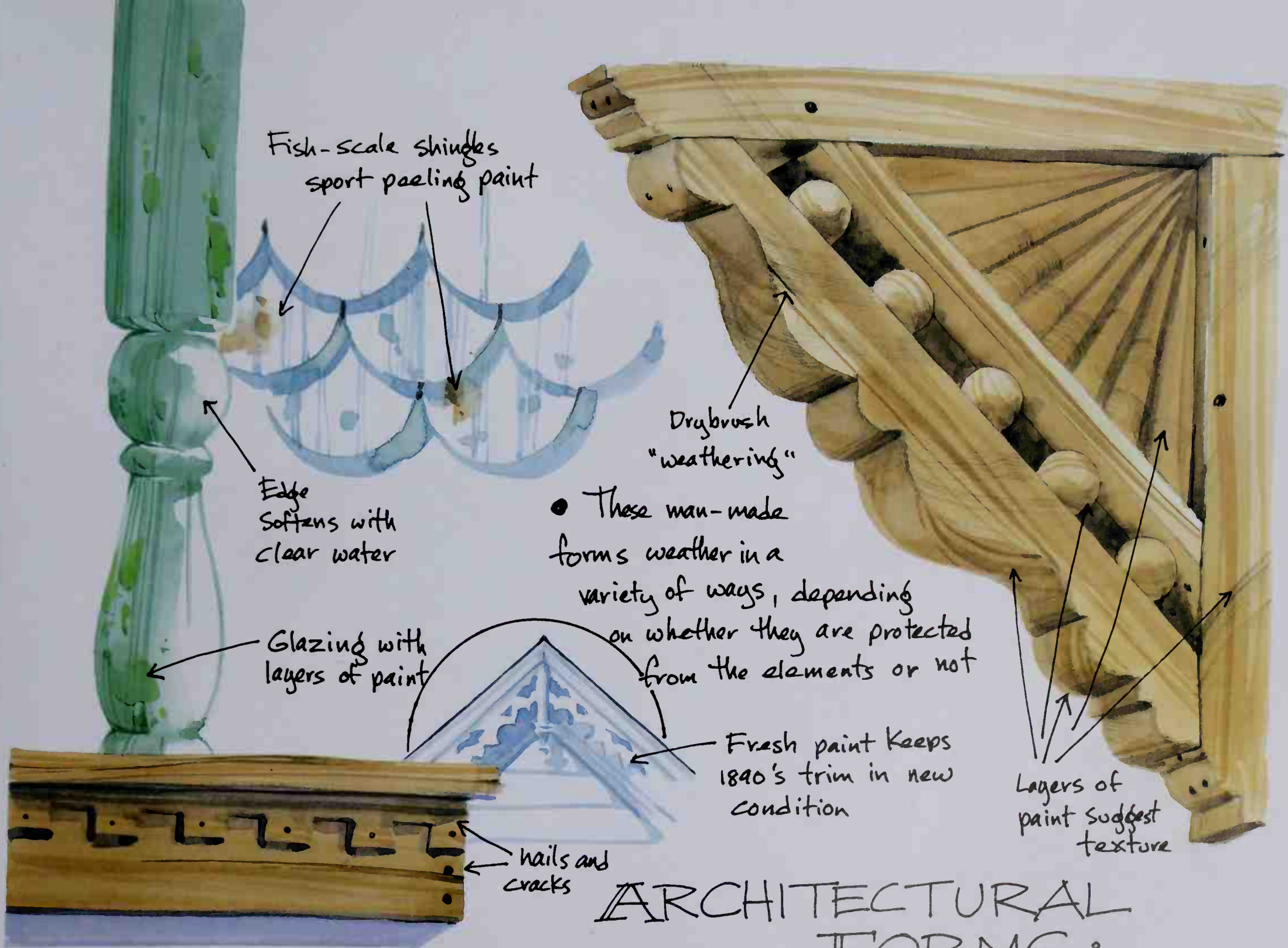
wet-in-
wet
makes a
soft
transition

• Step 1... Lay down a
   varied underwash —
   remember the play of
   warm + cool

drybrush

• Step 2... Lay in glazes
   to suggest woodgrain.
   Vary shapes, colors,
   spacing. Spatter, if
   desired.

drybrush

• Step 3... Add final
   texturing, cracks,
   shadows, etc. Here,
   I have suggested
   spaces between boards.

Fish-scale shingles
sport peeling paint

Drybrush
"weathering"

Edge
Softens with
clear water

• These man-made
forms weather in a
variety of ways, depending
on whether they are protected
from the elements or not

Glazing with
layers of paint

Fresh paint keeps
1890's trim in new
condition

Layers of
paint suggest
texture

nails and
cracks

ÆRCHITECTURAL
FORMS:

LICHEN AND MOSS

These tiny vegetative life-forms can add more than texture to your work; they can add color. Most mosses, it's true, are a distinctive acidic green—but think how that can liven up a winter scene where the only other colors are the blue of sky and shadows and the varied grays of tree trunks. When mosses are full of moisture they are especially neon; when they're desiccated with drought, the colors are muted, subtle. Even the texture of dry moss is different, no longer velvet but more like a wiry brush. Lichen, on the other hand, can have a great variety of colors, bringing your work to life—kind of fitting for these ancient life-forms. Look closely at surfaces like rocks and tree bark. There you'll find bright splashes of orange and gold and blue-green among the gray of the more common lichen. Some are even black.

Like moss, lichen changes color and character with moisture, brightening and softening when it rains; the color of a lichen-covered tree trunk on a rainy November day is as lovely as any sunset. If you choose to depict an almost microscopic close-up, you'll find a broad range of forms, from the lacy branches of reindeer lichen to the brightly colored helmets worn by British soldier lichen to the gold or brown-filled bowls of cup lichen, all to be handled with careful and creative logic.

You can suggest these textures with underwashes of local color modeled with drybrush work. Stamping with a wad of paper towel or with a natural sponge dipped into pigment can suggest mossy textures. Where lichen is sparse, the variable-sized dots of spatter are a good substitute. And if light strikes individual forms, you may want to scrape through your wash for some light details.

Wet-in-wet work can stand in for these life-forms from a distance; drybrush can suggest any amount of detail. You can even drop rubbing alcohol into a wet wash to depict the rounded forms of shield lichen.
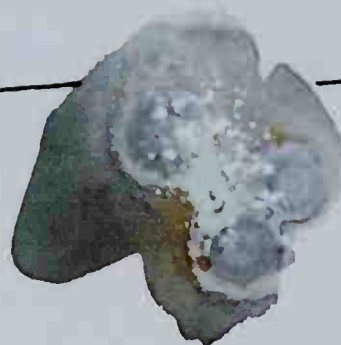
In an Ozark Dell 15" × 22"

rubbing
alcohol

spatter

Maskoid

Step 1...
mask out lichen forms
and add varied wash

Step 2... while
that wash is still
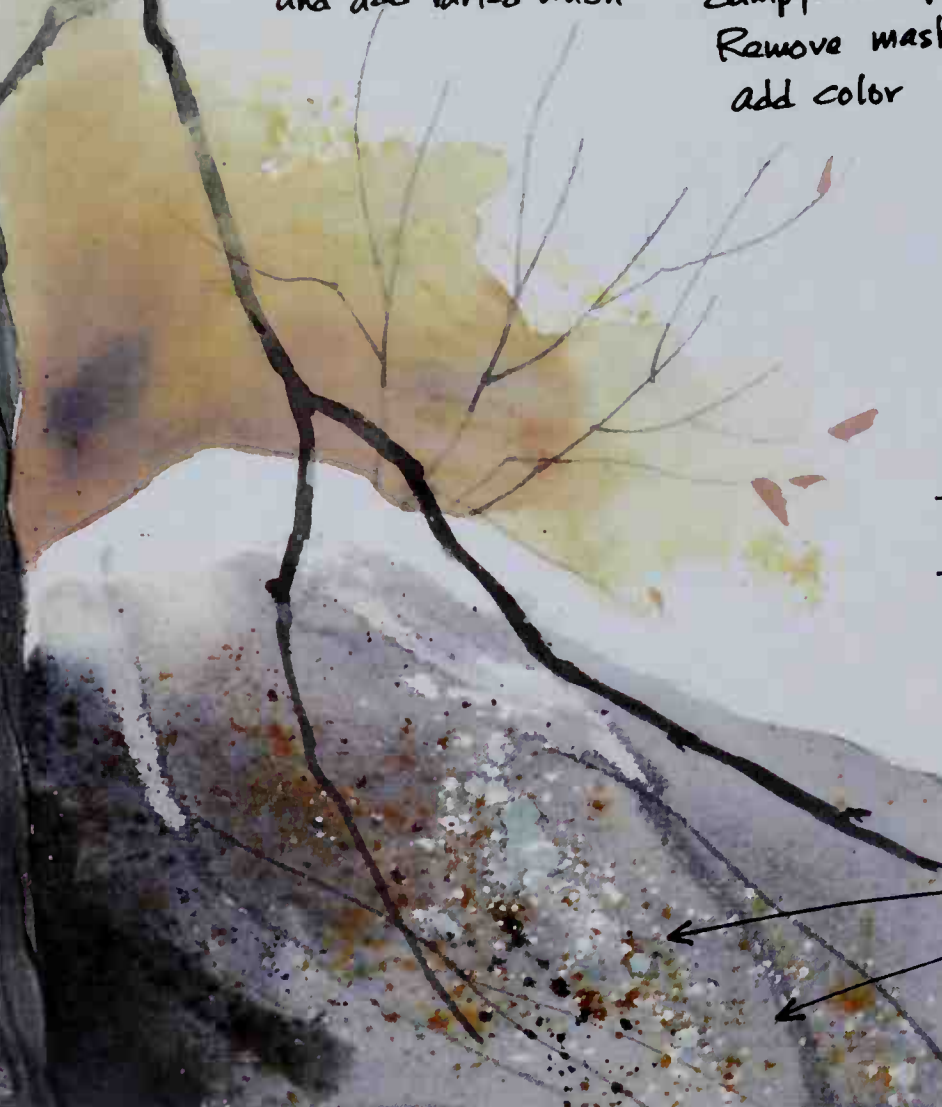damp, add spatter.
Remove mask and
add color

Step 3... finish
up with varied
colors of spatter

LICHEN

...from a distance

Rock lichen are often
orange or very dark

Even up close and finely
detailed, three steps can
suggest nearly any sort
of lichen —

- Step 1... first washes
- Step 2... when dry, add secondary
  washes to begin to explore
  form, light and shadow
- Step 3... finish up with
  small, sharp details,
  usually your darkest
  darks

LICHEN

up close....

Here, lichen
shape was
masked out of
bark wash; you
can see the first
washes in place

other
lichen
forms

finish this
shield lichen
with as much
detail as you
like

first
washes

develop
further
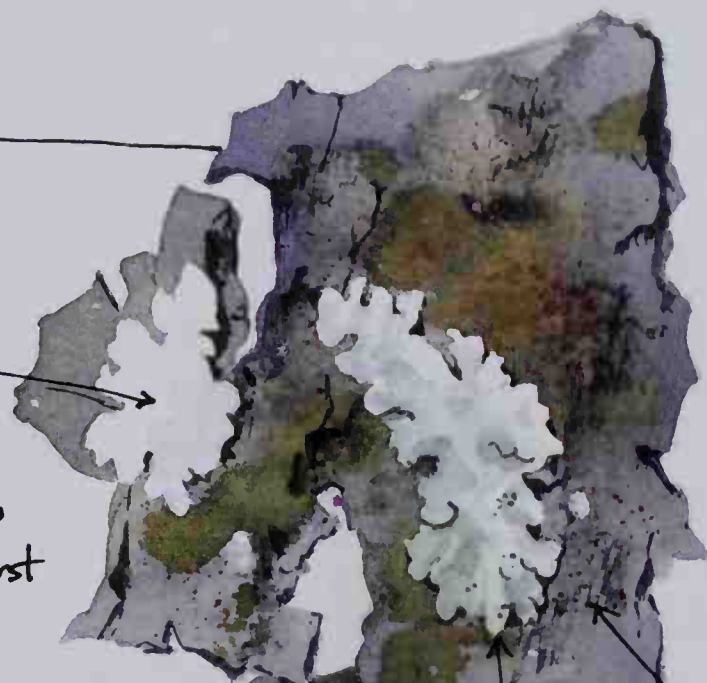
add dark cups
for cup lichen

←—— mushroom-like caps

rough
"branches"

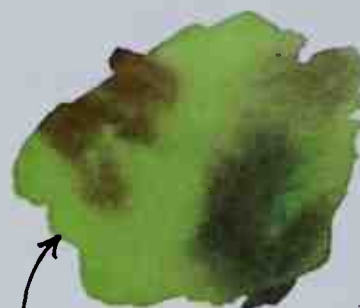tight little
scales

British soldier
lichen or
Cladonia

MOSS .... from a distance

There are many kinds of moss, but from a distance it's easy to handle them like this...

spatter

scraped lines

Step 1...
first washes

Step 2...
introduce color variation while damp

Step 3... as wash dries, scrape out lights, add spatter

varied washes, wet-in-wet

MOSS.... close up

Unless you're doing a botanical
study of a particular species
of moss, something similar
to this handling would probably
be sufficient. Here, the
basic three-step process
is enhanced with
Maskoid, applied
with a bamboo pen

wet-in-wet

fan brush used
to suggest
lacy edge

masked
out

small sable brush
used for details

FLOWERS

Perhaps you don't think of flowers when you think of texture, but if you can accurately depict their tactile properties, the reality of these lovely things is easier to capture.

Brainstorm a bit: What kinds of textures are we talking about when we think of flowers? There are more than you think. Roses, petunias, morning glories, pansies and iris are matte-textured — that is, there's little or no shiny highlight to worry about. Poppies, buttercups, strawflowers and some Hawaiian flowers, on the other hand, have a gloss that looks almost lacquered; still others, like peonies, have a more subtle, buffed glow. Some have overall texture created by many tiny flowers clustered on a single stalk: lilacs, snowballs, alyssum, forget-me-not, snapdragon and wild elder flowers fit this description. Some flower heads are complex shapes, such as carnations, asters, cockscomb, zinnias and marigolds. And some petals are themselves deeply ridged, like many of the members of the composite family, whose most common member is the daisy.

Here are a few techniques that can be helpful in capturing the variety of textures: When painting shiny flowers in watercolor, you must remember to retain that white paper to suggest highlights — or resort to scraping, erasing or opaque white. Textured or ridged petals can best be suggested with the same three simple washes used elsewhere — a local color wash, a bit of deeper definition and a detail wash. You can carry this as far as you like. When painting flowers with a complicated overall shape, try to map out the basic forms. Use value to make sense of the many shapes you see, and again, those same three basic washes can do it all.

Peony, Morning Light 11" × 15"

pay attention to the shapes of the
highlights — they follow the form of the petals

iris and roses
are among the
most popular of
matte-finish
flowers

w variation
values
single
al to
ggest
ss

a simple prelimin-
ary wash with no
highlight sets the
stage here

poppies and
buttercups
are among
our shiniest
flowers

retain that
shiny, white-
paper sparkle,
either by painting around
(as was done here) or by using
Maskoid

Second
washes

add as much detail
as you like, but keep
that velvety matte
finish

LSHINY or MATTE SURFACES

ROUGH, COMPLEX SHAPES and TEXTURED PETALS

other complex
flowers are zinnias,
mums — and
dandelions

final details add believability
and sparkle

the final washes
capture texture, form
and shadow —
here, violet
was used to
complement
the yellow

a simple,
almost solid wash
of this lipstick
red was used over
the whole flower
head

Second
washes of
stronger
yellow

map out and
simplify shadow
shades for your
secondary wash

the stem
received
the same three
washes

many flowers, especially those
in the daisy clan, have textured
petals that give interest to a
fairly simple flower-shape

the preliminary
yellow wash
has little
tonal variation

hether you're painting lilacs, snowballs,
obeflower or a wild plant
e elderberry (below)
e technique is
same —

e main
fference
in
inting
ative
ositive
apes.

askoid at
es pre-
es
pes

In this lilac, positive
shapes and wet-in-wet
work suggest
both form and
texture. A
bit of blotting
and some
detail work
when dry
Completed the flower

Details scratched
out with craft knife

Suggest interior
detail

Mask out
individual, lacy
shapes

Stems
in the
negative areas hold
the flower together

FLOWERS IN A FIELD

Of course these may not be daisies. Depending on where you are, you may see black-eyed Susans, clover, thistles, Queen-Anne's lace. The basic principles are the same — logical steps.

wet-in-wet spatter is softer, more subtle

Vary shapes and colors

Remember to make them smaller with distance

Mask out larger foreground flowers, if there are any
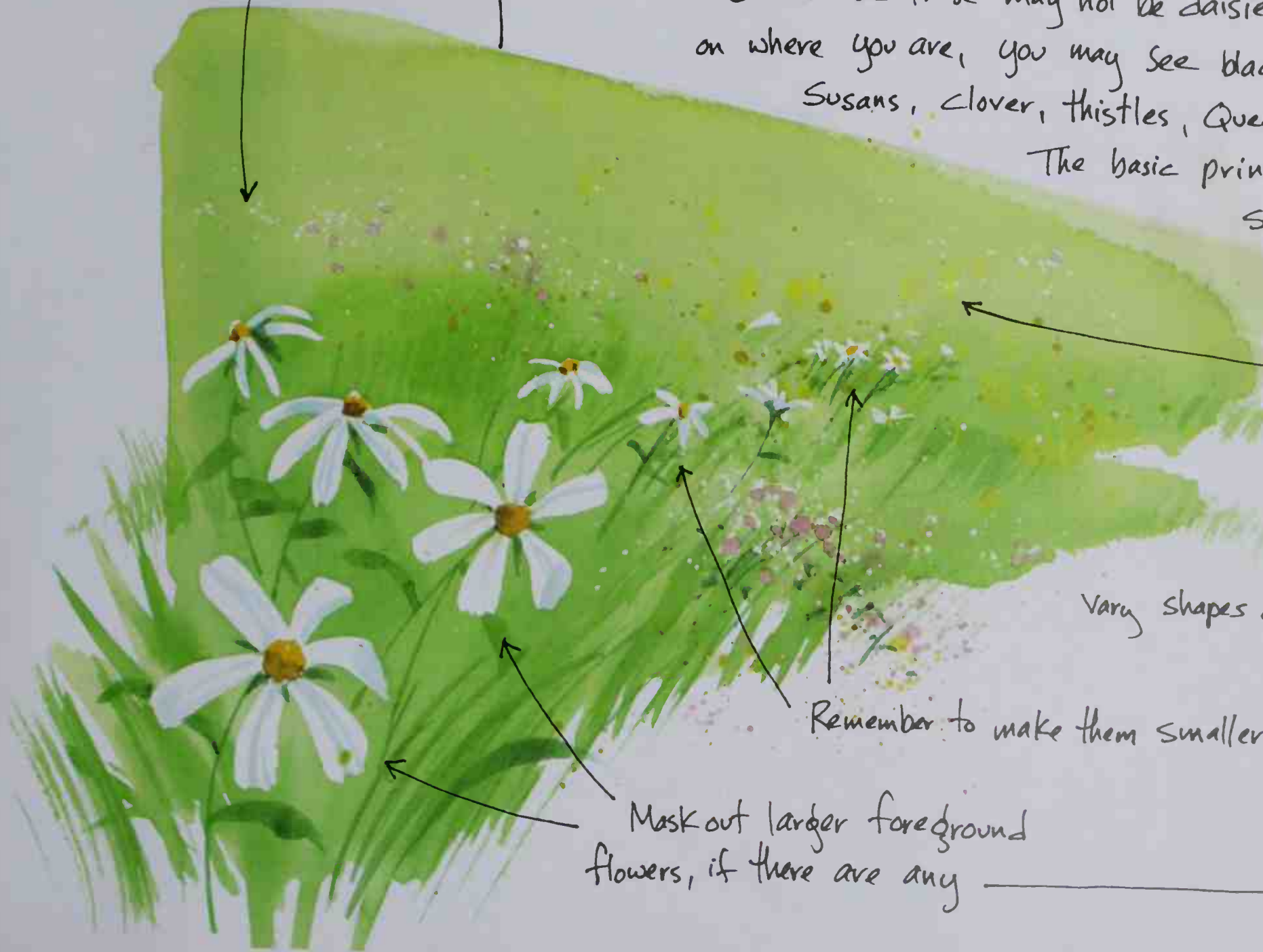
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

These wonderfully varied shapes and textures have fascinated artists from the Old Masters down to the present. How many still life paintings have you seen that utilize the ruddy shine of apples or the voluptuous glow of peaches, the bloom of grapes bursting with flavor you can almost taste? They're challenging to paint and always will be.

The textures of the particular subjects you've chosen can help you depict them with grace and beauty; surface characteristics can say as much as overall shape or color. Would you believe a banana that was as shiny and unblemished as a winesap? Part of what a banana *is* is soft, unhighlighted color and those distinctive dark bruises. A matte-finish green pepper wouldn't look very appetizing, and a potato with a shine would make you wonder what on earth you were looking at. It's in seeing and capturing those differences on paper that you can bring your still lifes to *real* life.

Plan ahead. That's good advice not only for Scouts and builders of bridges but for anyone wanting to capture a specific subject, a specific effect. Save the white of your paper, either by masking or painting around, to suggest the shine on a crisp, red apple. Plan shadow areas to capture form as well as texture. Allow your lights and darks to accentuate texture.

It's not necessary, of course, to paint a portrait of a particular potato or pear. Charles Demuth, in fact, often used a technique that looked rather as if he had quickly blotted a wet, free wash, making an extremely effective textural surface without a trace of overworking. Look for ways to *suggest* texture without the necessity of carefully painting each blemish and mark. Blotting, finger painting, stamping and drybrush are only a few of the techniques possible.

A Pair of Pears 11″×15″

APPLES and OTHER SHINY FRUITS
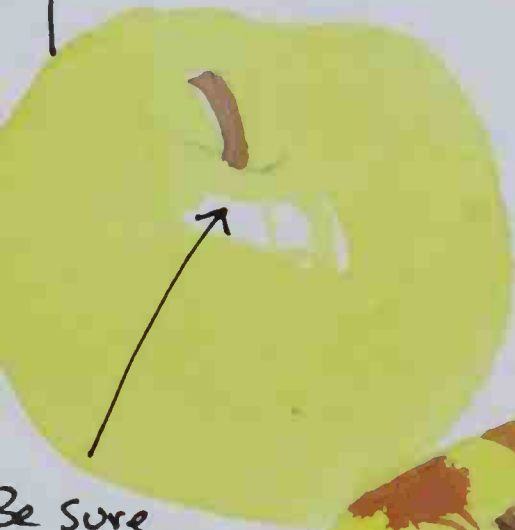
1.- Lay in a preliminary wash — in this case I used a yellow-green not only to make a color vibration but to capture the color variation of the apple

Be sure
keep that
nine — mask
— out if
ou need to

Lines add to the
illusion of roundness
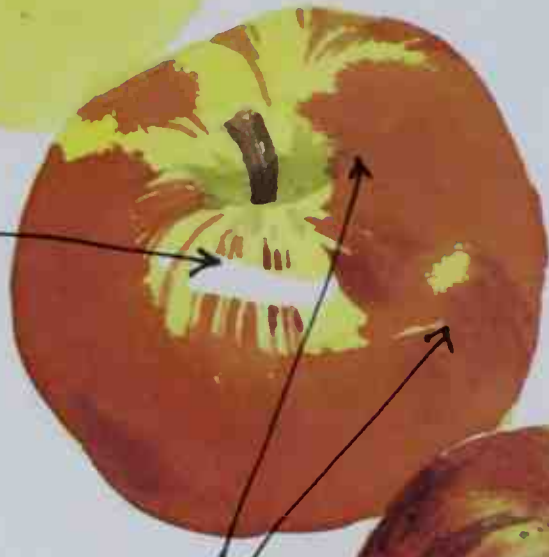
2. — Add secondary washes, following form of fruit. Let some variation in value suggest roundness, light and shadow

3. — Final details finish up, some painted and some scratched out with a craft knife

Here, I masked out the rather complex sparkle

Details complete the illusion

Blue, orange's complement, used in shadow area.

Knife blade used here
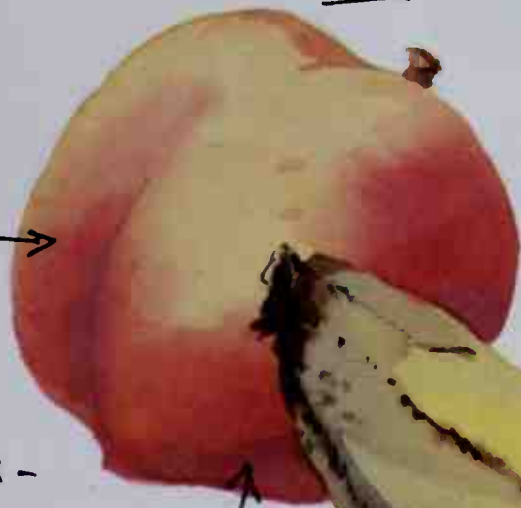
BANANAS and OTHER LUSTERLESS FRUITS

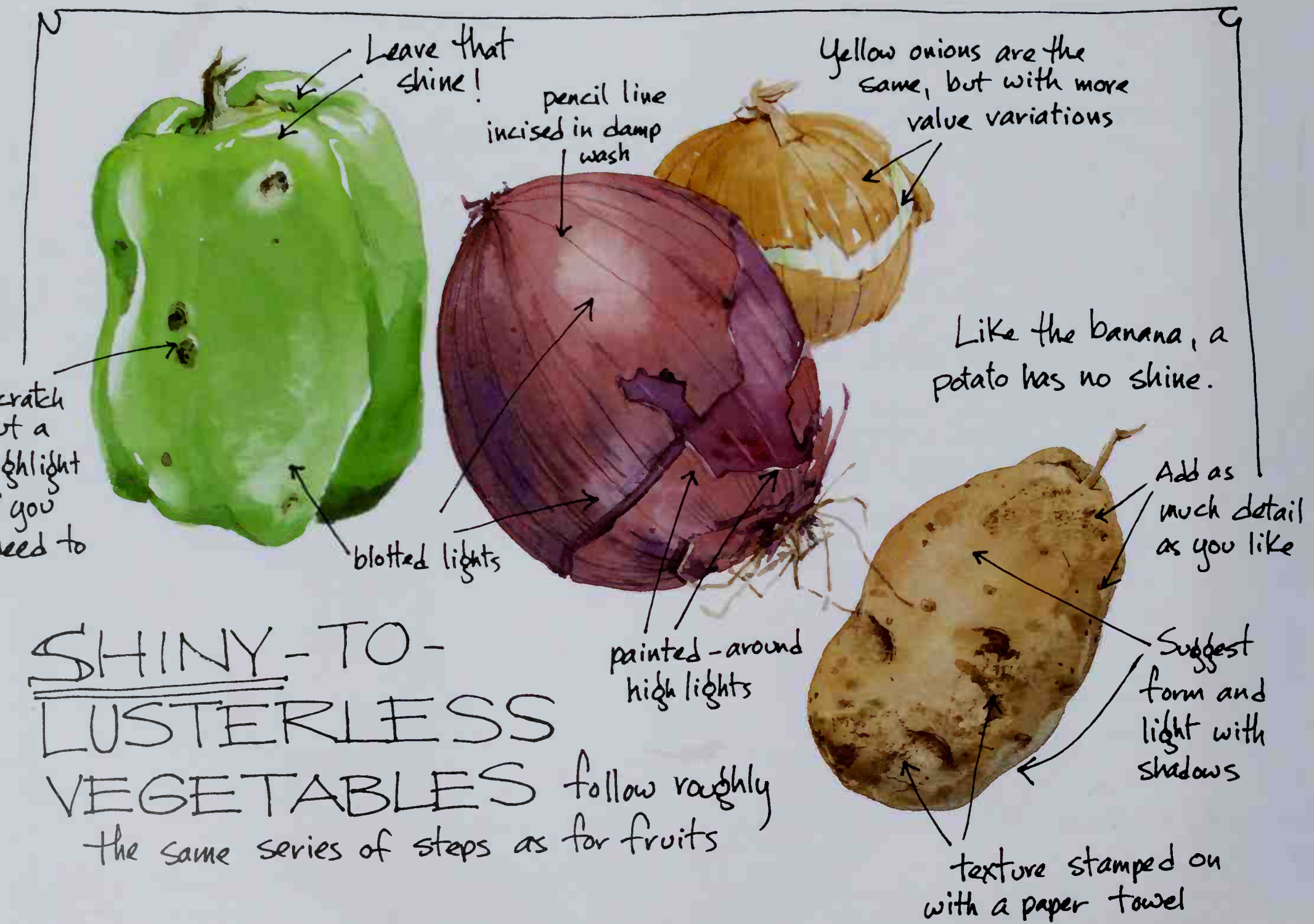1. — Keep the preliminary wash solid, or nearly so

2. — Add shadows — either when the first wash is dry or while it's still damp

3. — Final details added both wet-in-wet and dry to complete the illusion (_much_ easier than shine)

Most washes added wet-in-wet for soft, peach-fuzz effect

Fairly dark shadows

Leave that
shine!

pencil line
incised in damp
wash

Yellow onions are the
same, but with more
value variations

Like the banana, a
potato has no shine.

crath
t a
ghlight
you
eed to

blotted lights

Add as
much detail
as you like

Suggest
form and
light with
shadows

SHINY-TO-
LUSTERLESS
VEGETABLES follow roughly
the same series of steps as for fruits

painted-around
high lights

texture stamped on
with a paper towel

Grapes have what is called a "bloom," a light, almost powdery coating.

blotted to suggest "bloom"

basic wash

It isn't necessary to paint every seed on a strawberry — finish only if you want to

here, each small highlight was painted around — a bit tedious unless you're doing a botanical, but the color variation on this raspberry is fun

lift with a damp brush

I masked out these pronounced highlights and some of the seeds

Variations suggest form

final details added with a fine brush

VARIETIES OF FRUIT SHAPES AND SHINES

FUR

The burgeoning interest in wildlife art in the last few years makes this chapter—forgive the pun—a natural. And after capturing the spark of life in the eyes and the dynamics of the overall shape, fur texture adds most to your work.

Bears, raccoons, bison and other furred creatures are wonderful in watercolor; capturing them on paper is most satisfying. Deer, antelope, and other smoother-haired animals are perhaps less challenging (a local color wash with a bit of suggested detail is almost always sufficient). The longer-haired creatures pose a number of dilemmas. How much detail shall I attempt, a rough approximation of texture or an every-hair-on-its-back rendering? What technique best captures what I see — or what I want to see when I'm finished?

Part of your decision will rest, of course, on the distance of your subject. If the bear is in the back or middle ground, there's no need—and no way—to paint more than the roughest suggestion of fur. If he is your main subject, close as the family dog, then you'll probably want to suggest a bit more detail. (On the other hand, if the bear is as close as your dog, you're in a world of trouble.) There are still a variety of possible techniques to choose from, however; drybrush, wet-in-wet, straight washes or any combination of these may best satisfy you.

Smooth, shiny animals are fun to paint, as well. The family pets can stand in here for their wild cousins. Many of my own favorite paintings have been of my cats—selling one of these is out of the question. And then of course there is the variety of *stuffed* pets we find around us; the teddy bear decade is not over by a long shot, and these cuddly toys can add a friendly, approachable element to an otherwise overly serious still life.

WET-IN-WET

very wet

blotted here to
regain control

scratched out

very wet

drybrush

A wet-in-wet handling can be extremely tricky — and extremely effective for suggesting soft, long hair or fur. Here, I wet the paper first (after roughly sketching in Coyote, my cat), then blotted where the pigment threatened to spread too far. Keep pigment mixtures rather thick to aid in controlling its wild spreading. As the wash begins to dry, you can continue to add as much detail as you like, in the end combining wet-in-wet with a bit of drybrush work.

DRYBRUSH

Drybrush can be accomplished in several ways: Here, a small (#1) sable brush was used to make repeated strokes of darker color over an underwash. If you prefer, you could also work with a larger round red sable with its bristles spread, a flat brush used the same way, or a fan brush. In any case, load the brush with pigment, remove excess moisture, and work until you get the amount of detail you want.

↖ large round red sable

very little detail painted on an underwash

↑ flat brush

↑ fan brush

↑ no drybrush work here

lots of detail

↑ underwash

FUR

from a distance

a few simple shadow-shapes

just a suggestion of roughness here

this young fox is small enough to be in the background. Very little detail is necessary, and in fact the simplicity of handling helps suggest distance

the resting fox is more middleground- a <u>bit</u> of drybrush and detail brings him forward

overall wash with a few hairs

Maskoid used to pick out white hairs

individual hairs here and there are sufficient for the illusion of a fluffy tail
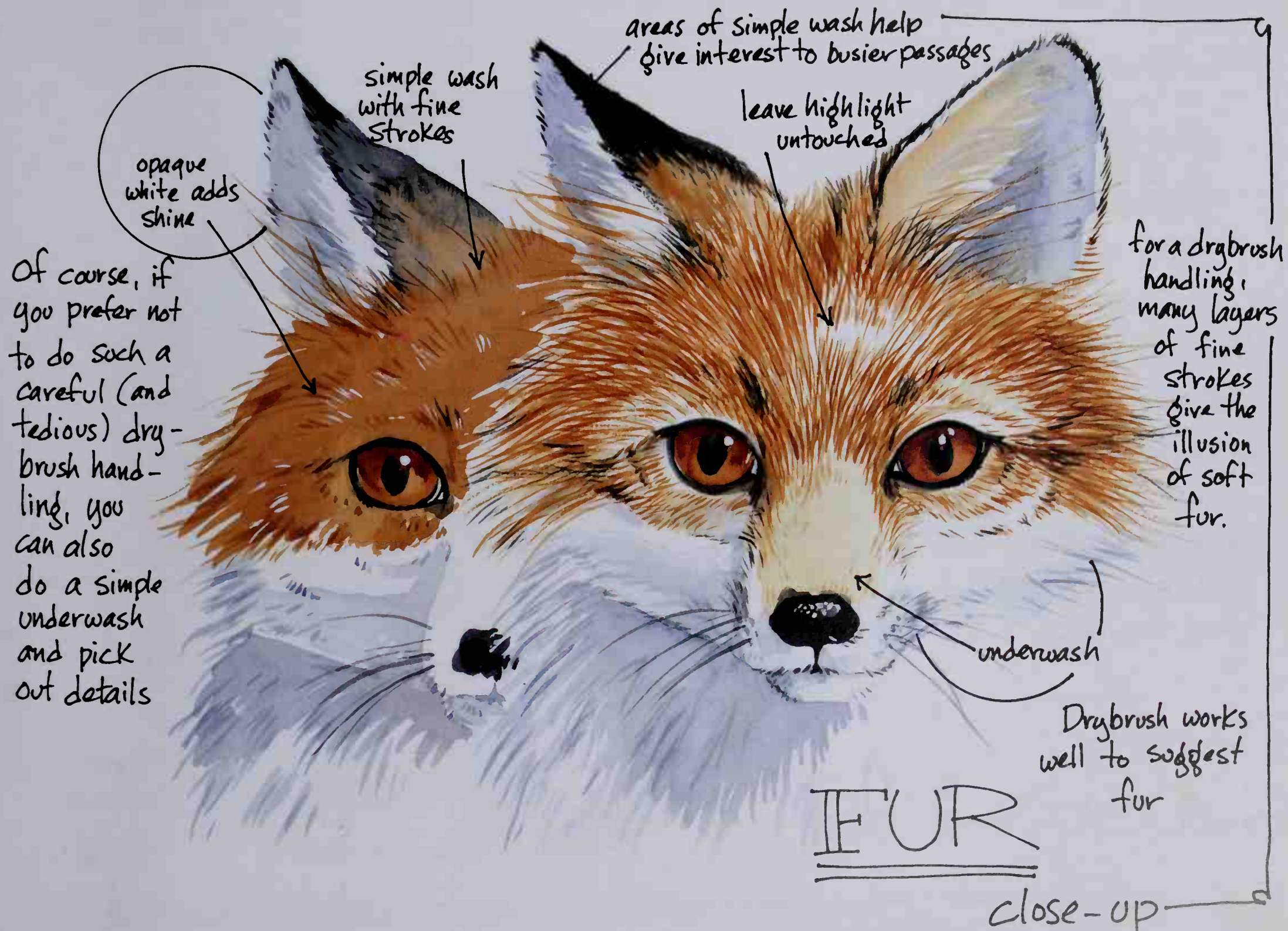
areas of simple wash help give interest to busier passages

leave highlight untouched

simple wash with fine strokes

opaque white adds shine

Of course, if you prefer not to do such a careful (and tedious) dry-brush hand-ling, you can also do a simple underwash and pick out details

for a drybrush handling, many layers of fine strokes give the illusion of soft fur.

underwash

Drybrush works well to suggest fur

FUR

close-up

— a schematic
or "map"
helps you
to see where
these shapes
are

rough
edge

his is the most
ifficult kind of fur
o paint - watch for
oody contours
d light direction
o help explain highlights and
deep shadows

a
bit of
opaque
white on
light-struck
hairs

ARK,
LOSSY FUR

if you prefer a simpler
handling, lay in a dark wash
and quickly blot highlights

My first attempt was too
dead + brown. Second time
around I added the blue
cast to reflect an imagined
sky overhead.

alternate a smooth
and rough
outline for
maximum
impact

lines scraped
into damp wash,
lines scraped out of
wash beginning to
lose its shine

rough, loose strokes

scratched
out

In this middleground
handling, the underwash was
laid in quickly, varying color
for interest. While it was
quite wet, I scraped lines
in it to suggest rough hair.
More lines were scraped
out as the wash dried,
and finally a few
additional lines were
added to the dry wash.

ROUGH
FUR or HAIR

FUR PATTERNS

Depending on your distance from your subject, you may choose to go for more or less detail. For the Pronghorn, I merely differentiated overall patterns and suggested a few hairs to tie areas together.

...is is hot-
...ess paper, so
...e underwash
...self has a
...it of
...exture

individual hairs

#1 brush used for these strokes

The young bobcat has a bit more detail, but the same basic technique — underwash (allowed to dry), modeling, and final details added with a fine sable brush.

wet-in-wet

blotted lights
with a
tissue

details added when
everything was thoroughly dry

FAKE FUR

Of course, manmade "fur"
has many textures, from a deep,
velvety pile to this nubbly sheep-
skin effect. The basic approach
is the same, but here I worked
a bit longer with the underwash,
blotting and dabbing in pigment
to capture the curly fleece.
Later, when the initial wash
dried, I added the linear details,
button eyes, and stitched-on nose.
(I chose Miguel for his blue color!)

HAIR

Painting people is one of the most satisfying occupations; artists have been doing it for centuries. Whether you do a formal portrait or an informal one or simply add figures to your work for interest, painting hair will be a part of that expression. And texture is at the heart of the subject.

It's more than the hairdresser's definition of texture; whether the hair is coarse or fine is hardly a matter of concern to the painter. It's the visual texture that counts here, and hairstyle contributes immeasurably to the effect. Think how different long, straight hair is from tight curls when it comes to painting them. Think of how you might best depict waves, or ponytails, or braids.

Then there's facial hair. Eyebrows, mustaches and beards add a great deal to your finished painting; if you are trying for a close likeness, they're essential.

In most cases, the problem can be handled with amazing simplicity. What looks at first like a rather daunting affair can be simplified into those same three simple steps: local color wash, shadow wash (perhaps scraped back into while damp to suggest strands of hair) and details. Look at our examples: There's not that much difference in the overall *handling* of straight hair from that of the tight ringlets on page 104, but the final visual effects are as different as the hairstyles themselves.

It's not necessary to paint every hair; a suggestion is usually more evocative, more effective — and fresher, to boot. Even those tight curls needn't be overworked. A suggestion of drybrush work catches the overall feeling.

Miranda 11″ × 15″ Collection of Jenny and John Pavlich

STRAIGHT HAIR

Step 1... Lay in a local color wash — in this case, burnt sienna.

Maintain some value variations and highlights

For blond hair, of course, begin with a pale, golden wash

Step 2... While the preliminary wash is still fairly wet drop in cool shadows. Allow to dry somewhat, then scrape out highlights.

scraped out with the end of a brush

highlights, light-struck hairs scratched out with craft knife

drybrush

Step 3... Delineate strands and separate hairs with a fine sable brush or split hairs of a larger brush for drybrush effect. A trimmed fan brush works well, too.

WAVES IN HAIR

leave white paper for light-struck areas

Step 1...
Lay in a local color wash _after_ mapping where you want waves to be. (You may want a bit more color variation.)
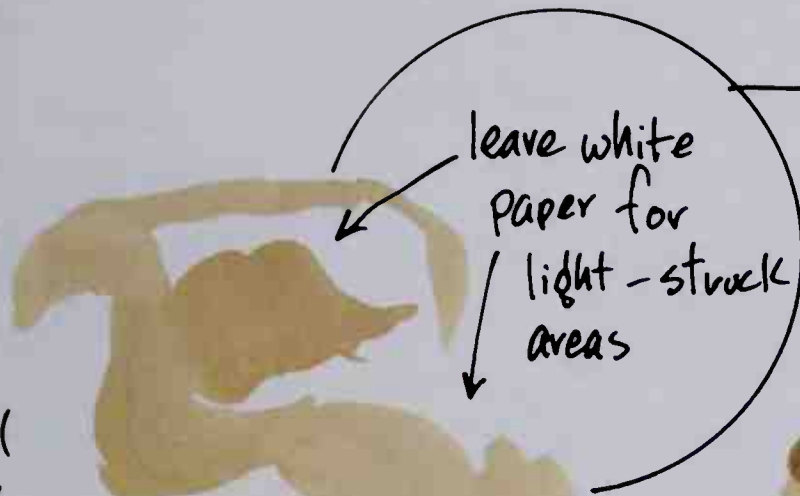
Step 2... Add darker values in shadowed areas. Scrape out strands while this wash is still damp

Scratched out with end of aquarelle brush

drybrush work can add as much or as little detail as you like
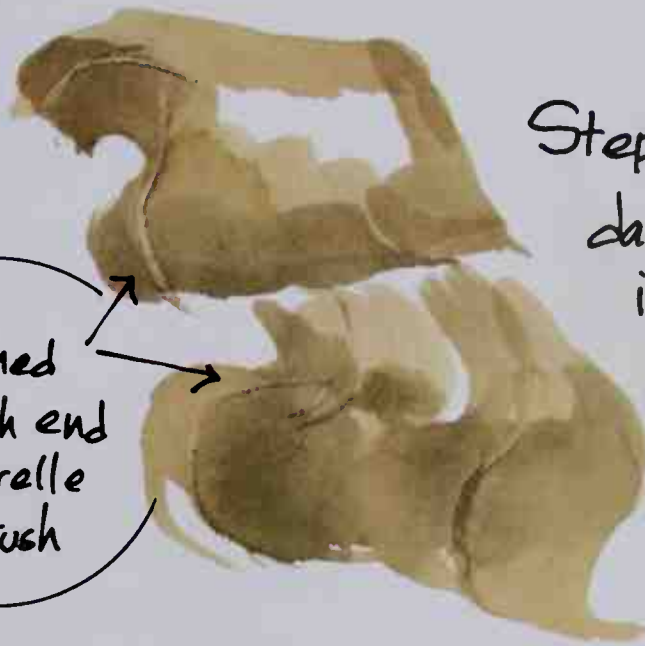
Step 3... Drybrush in final details, using a round red sable or a trimmed fan brush. Scratch out strands with a craft knife.
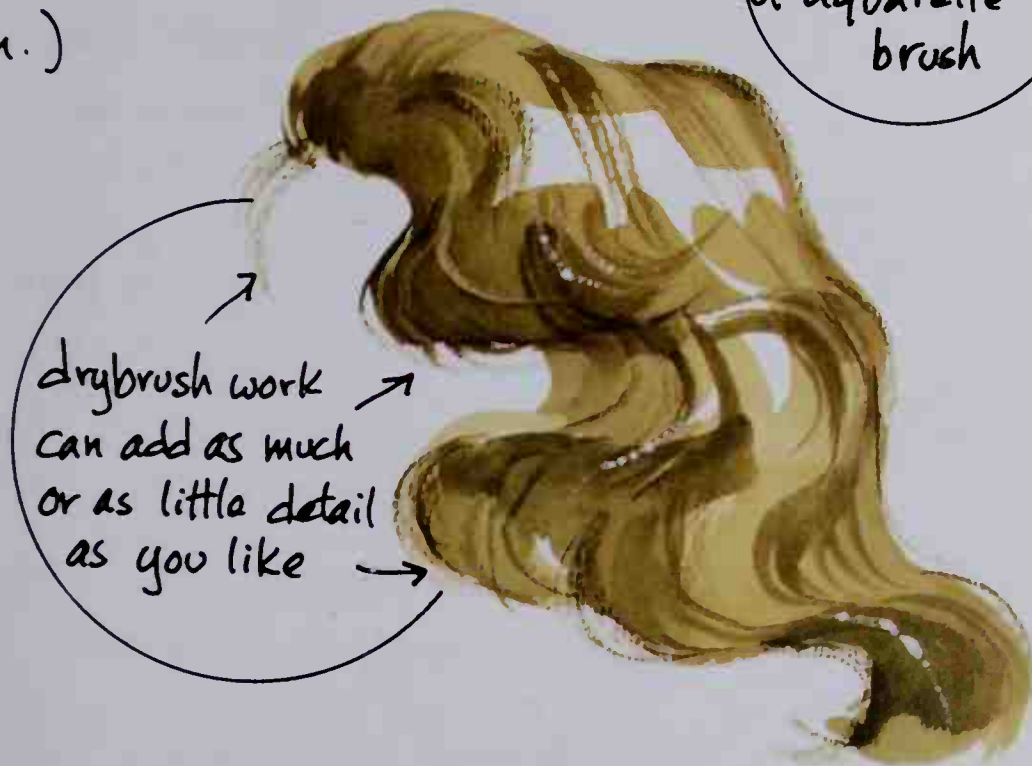
CURLY HAIR

Whatever its length, curly hair follows basically the same form

Step 1... Lay in a loose, somewhat lacy form with local color – for blonde you can use yellow ochre or raw sienna.

scraped out with brush handle

Step 2... While this wash is still somewhat wet, come back in with a darker shadow wash. As the wash loses its shine you can incise highlights with a brush handle or finger nail.
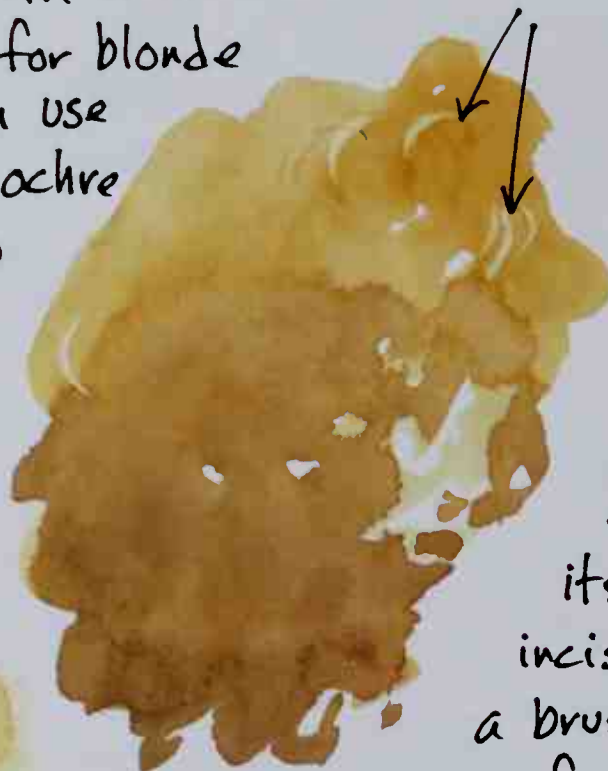
light-struck hairs scratched out with a craft knife

Be sure to get plenty of color variation in curly hair.

black don't just use black pigment

Step 3... When the first washes are dry, add as much detail as you like using a small brush or a larger brush used drybrush-style. Here, a "barbered" fan brush was used to suggest ringlets.

FACIAL HAIR

Same technique for a womans brows, of course, no matter what the angle

Vary values in eyebrows so they don't look pasted on.

A long beard can benefit from quite a bit of drybrush work

Some color variation

A shorter beard gets some drybrush, some scraping and some final scratching

Scraped through wash with fingernail

Drybrush for longer stubble

A "five o'clock shadow" is simply a bit of blue in flesh-color wash

with love to Molly —
Cath

SKIN TONES AND TEXTURES

Think of the varieties of textures within this single topic—a baby's cheek is very different from that of a sailor accustomed to long hours on the ocean under an unrelenting sky. A face with a fine, woven net of lines has a texture quite removed from that belonging to a fresh young girl.

The technique you choose can go a long way toward exploring these differences. Wet-in-wet can be used to suggest soft, delicate skin, while drybrush can add all the texture you'd ever need. A *combination* of these techniques can cover literally any situation, allowing you to lay in a soft undertone of color, then build up layers of character on top. Even the pigments you choose can add to the illusion of texture. Transparent pigments like alizarin crimson can really express a glow, while the graininess inherent in some of the opaque, separating pigments like burnt umber or burnt sienna (cooled with ultramarine or manganese) contributes a texture of its own.

When working with young skin, keep your washes relatively simple. Lay them in quickly and decisively, then get out. Don't keep working over the area or it will become muddied—and may develop rough textures where you want smooth ones. When you're working with a subject with a bit more character, however, you can add as many washes as you like, although it's usually more satisfactory to allow each to dry thoroughly before adding subsequent layers. Reserve the bolder colors for these older, more highly textured subjects, and watch for areas that add character—smile lines, crow's-feet, and so on.

And of course, the distance between you and your subject will again affect how much texture you want; distant subjects require almost none, while those close up can take as many layers as you like.

Molly in Mufti 11″ × 15″ Collection of Molly Hammer

SMOOTH, YOUNG SKIN

Keep washes relatively simple; try to put them down where you want them in one go in order to retain a youthful freshness.

Washes should be transparent; try to avoid opaque colors like yellow ochre and cadmium red when painting young skin.

You may want to work partly wet-in-wet for a soft, youthful effect.

minimum of detail

soft, fresh color

wet-in-wet

WEATHERED SKIN

When painting a complexion with a little more of life written on it, you can have fun adding detail: crow's feet, facial planes, veins, expression lines, etc.

Color can be as bold as you like; here you can use opaque pigments, including some burnt sienna mixed into the shadow areas. Watch for expressive shadows, like those thrown by the eye glasses.

fine brush for details, or scratch through a damp wash

layer as many washes as you like to get the effect you're after

strong color

2

shadow areas kept simple, too

very simple washes — virtually no detail and only 2 washes used

bit ore acial etail

Consider how much detail is actually needed to capture your subject. In the very far distance, a single wash should be sufficient.

transparent washes were used to model this close-up

painting-around, blotting, and lifting add highlights

"Up close and personal," you can add as many layers as it takes to make you happy — but do allow previous washes to dry first to keep from getting muddy colors.

rom a somewhat esser distance ou may ant to ry your nderwash nd add 2-3 shadow washes

small details added last

here, 3 or 4 washes add character

MISCELLANEOUS HINTS

wet-in-wet may work well when painting young skin
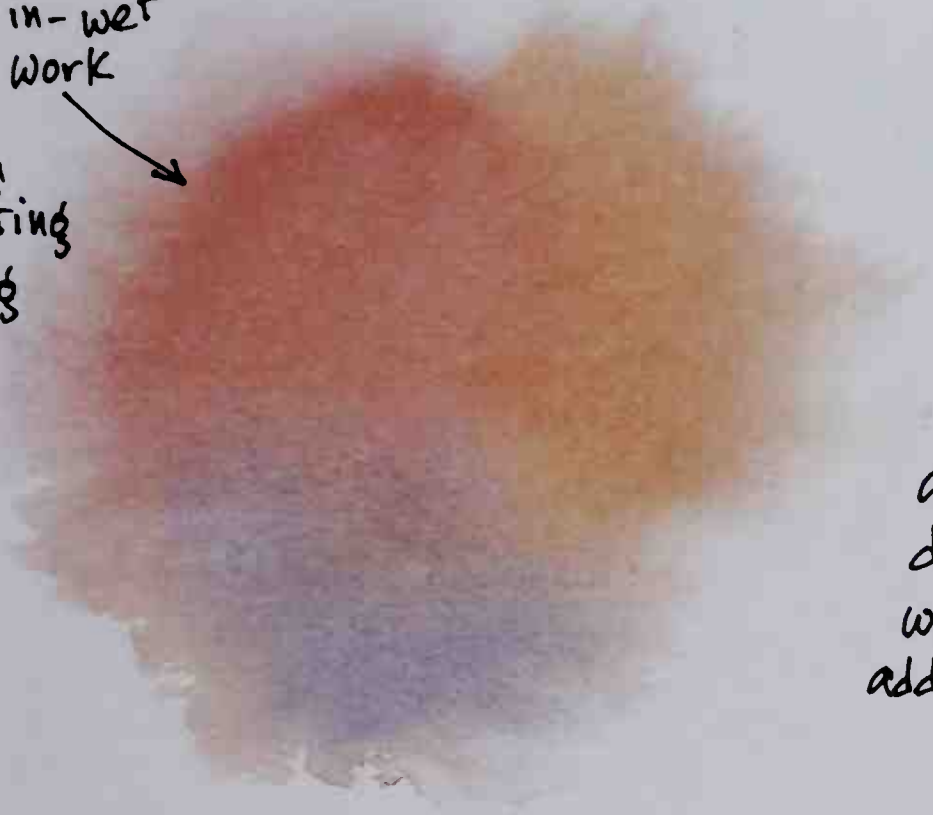
here, transparent layers were used for a fresh effect — and more control

edges softened with clear water

a little drybrush work can add character

Choose your pigments according to the effect you're after and the color of your subject's skin

new gamboge

alizarin crimson

ultramarine blue

TRANSPARENT

yellow ochre

manganese blue

Cadmium red medium

OPAQUE

burnt umber

alizarin crimson

thalo blue

DARK

GLASS AND METAL

You may not have thought of these smooth, shiny objects as having textures at all, but they do—smooth, shiny ones. They're a real challenge to capture in most cases, because you're not only concerned with local color but with reflections and, in the case of glass, transparency. What you can see *through* the glass affects the color/texture as much as the local color itself. Highly textured glasses—cut or molded glass—pose an additional challenge, as the facets catch and hold the light, then return it to the eye.

Really, it's a matter of simple observation. Look at what you see and the logic involved. It's not necessary to paint a "portrait" of a specific decanter or teapot (unless you're a photorealist). You can simplify what you see by mapping, as you did for the glossy fur a few chapters back. Notice how the light breaks along a facet and what reflects there. See what it is that is near that silver coffeepot or copper skillet that will affect not only reflections but color.

Glass is a combination of transparency and reflection; shiny metal is all local color and reflection. Both tend to have a broad variance in value patterns. Very, very light tints will be juxtaposed directly beside the darkest darks, and often there's only a mid-value or two between these two extremes. (That's what gives the shiny sparkle: light-lights and dark-darks without a lot of mud in between.)

When you're painting shiny metal, local color becomes extremely important. Copper, bronze and brass all have color of their own, while silver is almost completely reflective and pale in the extreme. Notice the variety of colors that went into the copper pot on page 116, and the white of the paper that says shine. (If I'd been painting silver, only the reflections and a bit of luminous gray would have to tell the story.)

Duller, tarnished or highly textured metals, on the other hand, have a very close value range. Not a lot of deep darks or sparkly whites here. Look for ways (drybrush, spatter, spongework) to express the texture that hard use has given these objects.

Enamel Coffeepot 15" × 22"

Step 1 –

Map out shapes and lay in preliminary washes, maintaining white highlights

highlights

highlights

Keep shapes interesting

maintain those whites

• Step 2 –

second washes capture shapes of light and shadow – darker than first washes

shadow shapes

accent shapes

• Step 3 –

Add dark accents, still paying attention to both the shape of the objects and the Shapes of lights and darks

maintain whites

SHINY GLASS

- Step 1 - Draw in the pattern of your glass ware, simplifying where possible - just do the major shapes. Keep white paper as your lightest light for plenty of sparkle, then add a light first wash
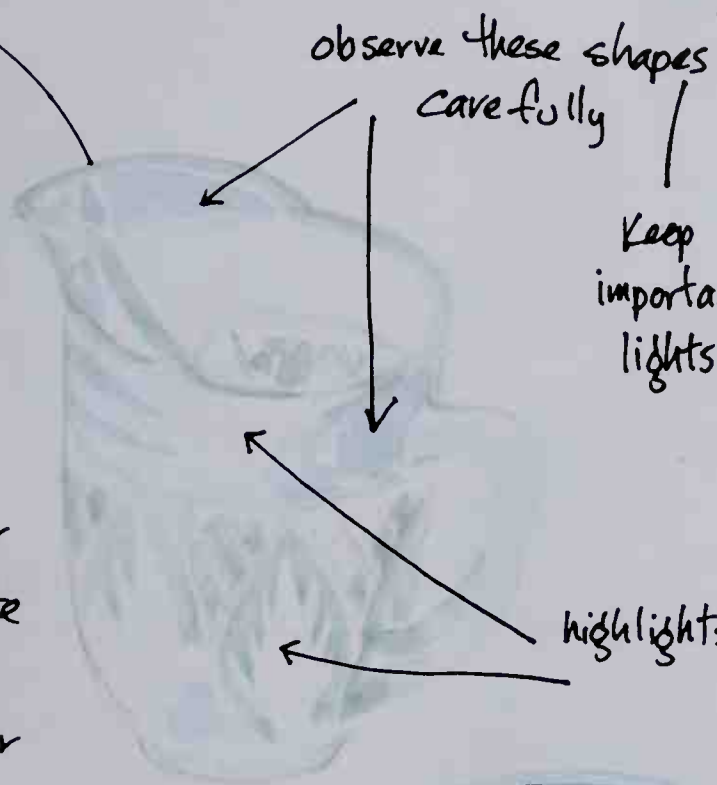
observe these shapes carefully

Keep important lights

highlights

- Step 2 - Second washes here capture not only the next darker value, but reflected or visible transparent color. (The little pitcher here was sitting on a red surface.)
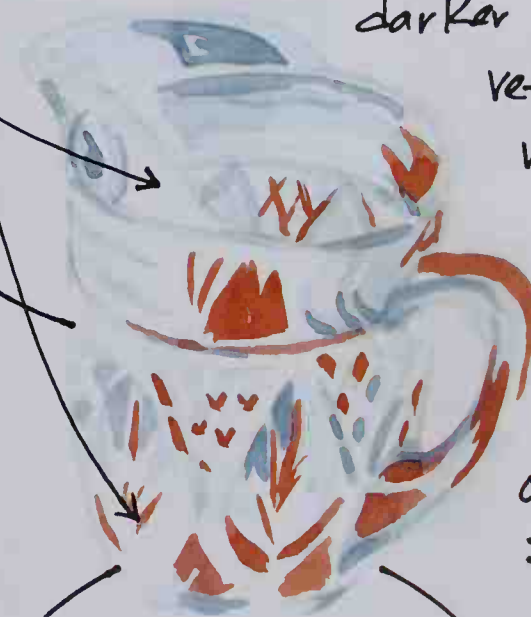
sharp, dark accents

- Step 3 - add the final dark, sparkly accents, and don't be afraid to be bold

CUT or MOLDED GLASS

—All of these colors were used to depict this copper-and-brass pot.

METAL...polished

The local color of the metal you paint is important, and usually goes down as your first (or second) value wash after the white-paper highlights.

In this case, Copper-color was created with cadmium orange and yellow, a little alizarin crimson and burnt sienna. Brass is mostly raw sienna. Then, _much_ darker values added next create the illusion of reflective, shiny metal surfaces.

Maintain white-paper shine.

reflected for erest

y different lues

METAL ...tarnished and textured

Here, local color is the most important element, since the range of values is so tight. Do allow this first wash to blend and vary, with soft transitions from lightest light (still fairly mid-value) to darkest dark. A little Sedimentary Manganese Blue suggests the patina of age. A little drybrush work completes textures.

A much narrower range of colors and values used here - very little reflective action

Very little if any sparkle - just a subtle glow

A little light + dark defines shape

Drybrush for texture

Mostly used white paper (sparingly) here to define shapes

RUST

Rust is such a lively, interesting and ubiquitous texture that it deserves a chapter all its own, quite independent from other metal subjects. The colors are warm, evocative. We sense not only age but endurance — and a certain transience in the moldering metals. A rusty old farm tractor abandoned in a corner of a field says something entirely different to us than a brand-new, shiny enameled monster on a vast agribusiness farm. We can relate; we're painting character, not an ad for a tractor company.

It's the same with any old tools that show the effects of time. We know these have been around, have been used — have been useful. A shiny new set of hinges might as well be an illustration in a hardware store's catalog for all the sense of connection with the human they have.

There's beauty in the aging process (now if we can just accept that truth when we look in the mirror!). The corrugated tin roof streaked with rust on the log cabin I used to occupy had it all over the asphalt shingles of my present home for character and durability — and certainly for interest when it comes to painting it!

When you paint rust from a distance, *you* choose how much detail is enough. A little spatter and a variation in color, as in step two of our first demo, may be all you want to say. If you want to carry it further, add a little drybrush work and a bit of detail (our sample might be that corrugated roof, or the single screw that weeps red tears on an old white shed). Close up, you can use every trick in the book: spatter, drybrush, spongework, wet-in-wet, puddling — you name it.

Don't be afraid to play with color, however. You don't need to stick to burnt sienna just because it's rust-colored. A little yellow ochre for an underwash, a bit of blue to reflect the sky, a spark of cadmium orange for warmth, a strong mixure of burnt umber and ultramarine blue to capture the look of handwrought iron just beginning to rust, a little purple or green — whatever it takes to satisfy *you*.

Haying Done 15" × 22"

wet-in-wet

scraping

Step 2... Wet-in-wet spatter and a few lines scraped in while the wash is damp add to the illusion — and in fact you could stop here quite happily.

Step 1...
Vary your prelim-inary wash for interest. Here, burnt and raw sienna are mixed with a little ultramarine blue.

nice tonal variation

drybrush

parallel lines suggest corrugation

Step 3...
Dry spatter, drybrush work and a little detailing (the corrugation lines) finish the sample.
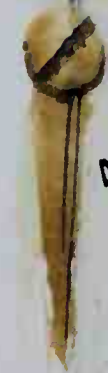
rust runs down with the effects of weather and water.

RUST...

rom a distance

Step 1... the preliminary wash in this case is gray (mixed from burnt sienna and cobalt blue) to suggest the color of galvanized metal.

Step 2... while this wash is still damp (glossy but not shiny) add some splotches of raw and burnt sienna partly mixed with ultramarine blue. Add spatter as it dries.

blob of paint laid in while damp makes nice, evocative hard edges.

wet and dry spatter

Step 3... finish up with more spatter and dry-brush work. Here, a natural sponge was used for additional texture.

sponge dipped in pigment

RUST...

close up

AGING METAL ... tools, hinges, etc.

Drybrush

Rust "bleed"

wet-in-wet

Blue-gray wash suggests peeling paint with rust working through

This wrought-iron hook is just beginning to rust – wet-in-wet creates the illusion.

Distant subjects need only a little detail work — here, a preliminary wash and a few details are all that's needed

Spatter and wet-in-wet work suggest a moderate degree of rust.
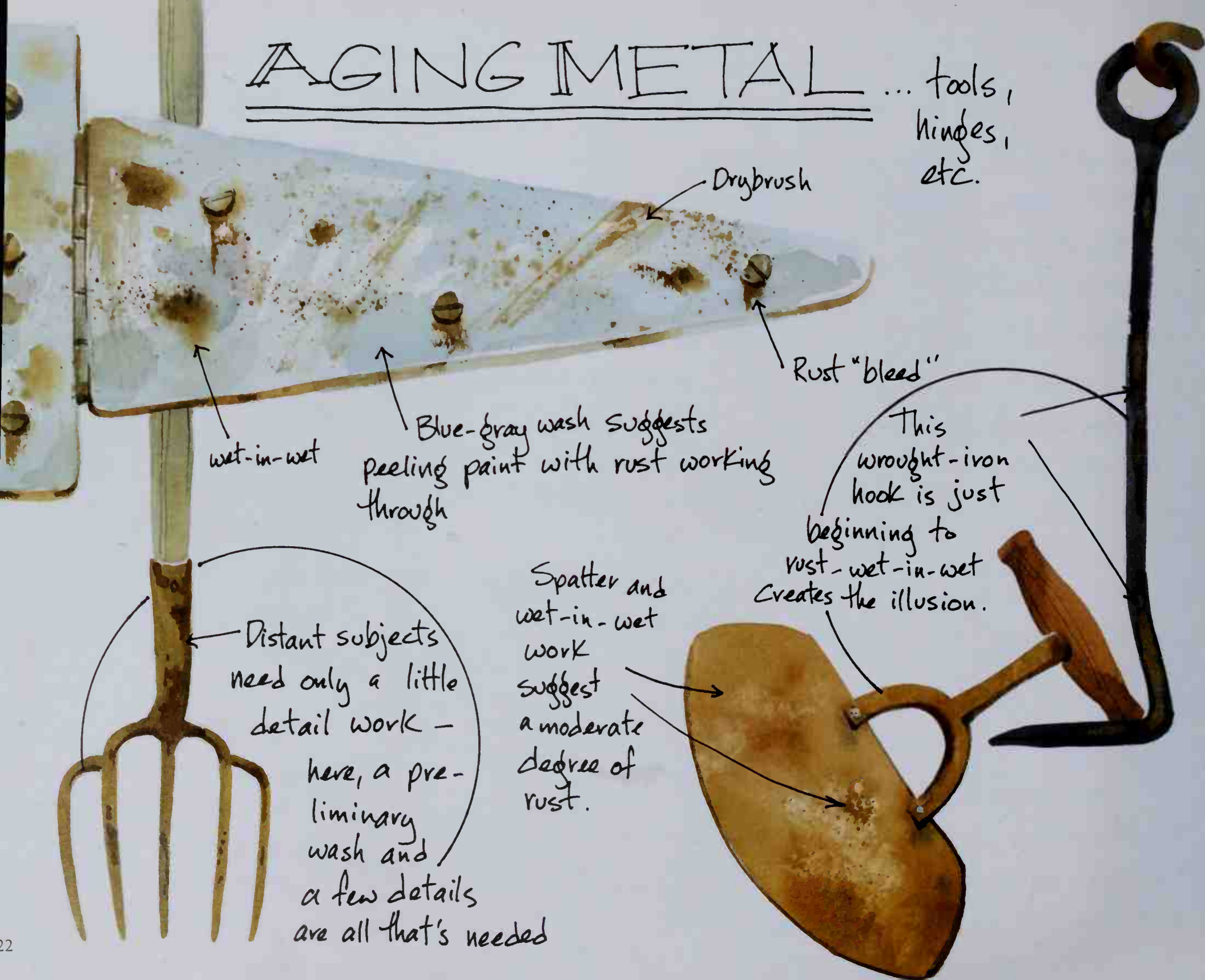
OLD CARS, TRACTORS, etc.

Subjects like this are too complex to paint in one go and still maintain your timing. It's easiest to do in sections: hood, fenders, front, etc., then add unifying details. The techniques at right are some of the possibilities for successful "rust."

wet-in-wet

spatter, wet and dry

drybrush

MISCELLANY

We've only scratched the surface, and we know it. There are so *many* tactile surfaces out there, such a variety of textures. This chapter touches on a few that didn't seem to warrant an entire chapter of their own but still needed to be explored, whether they be the domestic textures of a stucco wall or a polished wooden table, the familiar, personal texture of a favorite pair of corduroy pants, or the natural texture of a forest floor or a single feather.

In most cases, the same three steps will take you from here to there: underwash, secondary wash(es) and details. Think of those corduroy pants: Local color, shadows and folds, and just the suggestion of corduroy's distinctive texture are sufficient. In other cases, two steps may do it. For an open-weave fabric like jute or burlap, a fan brush used to crosshatch the surface and a few detail knots added later are sufficient — though on a larger scale you'd still want to suggest light and shadow. Still other subjects may require *more* steps to catch the effect you're after. When I painted the plaid throw on page 128, I first painted a simple, light wash and added a suggestion of shadows in the fabric's folds with a light, grayed blue. Then I painted in the premapped shapes of the elements of the plaid: red lines first, then blue, then green, then yellow, allowing them to overlap to suggest the complexities of plaid weaving. When that was dry, I added deeper shadows; if need be, I could finish with the kind of woven suggestion in the lower right-hand corner. You can play a bit with laces. Paint them directly, if you like, *or* wet a piece of lace in pigment and print with it — or paint *through* it, like a stencil.

Painting old, shiny wood is much like painting shiny metal, except the shine is more subdued. Still, there's a range between your lightest light and darkest dark, with not too many values in between — if the light source is strong enough. Many domestic textures are fun to paint: I like sheer, light-colored curtains and deeply textured stucco walls, but wallpaper textures are sometimes tedious, like plaid.

My favorite textures, however, are the natural ones: fungi and feathers, scales and seashells. They are so varied and so beautiful, but they're still relatively easy to capture, with care and creative logic.

And yes, there are still a *lot* of textures out there we haven't covered. Most are a matter of taking it slow, analyzing what you see, and being patient about getting from here to there.

Margaret in a Basket 15″ × 22″

FABRICS... corduroy, burlap and denim

first wash blotted for definition and texture

trimmed brush, ~~above~~ ... was ~~used~~ for this ~~o~~ther open-~~we~~ave fabric — ~~you~~ might spread ~~the~~ hairs of a ~~round~~ red sable ~~for~~ the same ~~eff~~ect. Jute, ~~lin~~en, and some ~~su~~nmade fabrics ~~sh~~are this texture. ————

ultramarine blue + burnt umber make good "denim"

these lines scratched in

final details

final details "sag" denim

Secondary washes define shadow folds

←For corduroy, the same basic steps apply — underwash, shadow wash, and details.

here, only the shadows are textured

here, an all-over corduroy texture was added with a small brush

SWEATER KNITS

Whether your subject is simple (like most sweater textures) or more complex (like this Irish fisherman's sweater), the usual sequence of steps will see you through. In the case of cable-knit, you simply need to draw yourself a "map" before beginning to paint.

Final texturing depends on how far you want to take it.

pencil "map"

first wash

second wash

drybrush

first wash

first wash

painted last
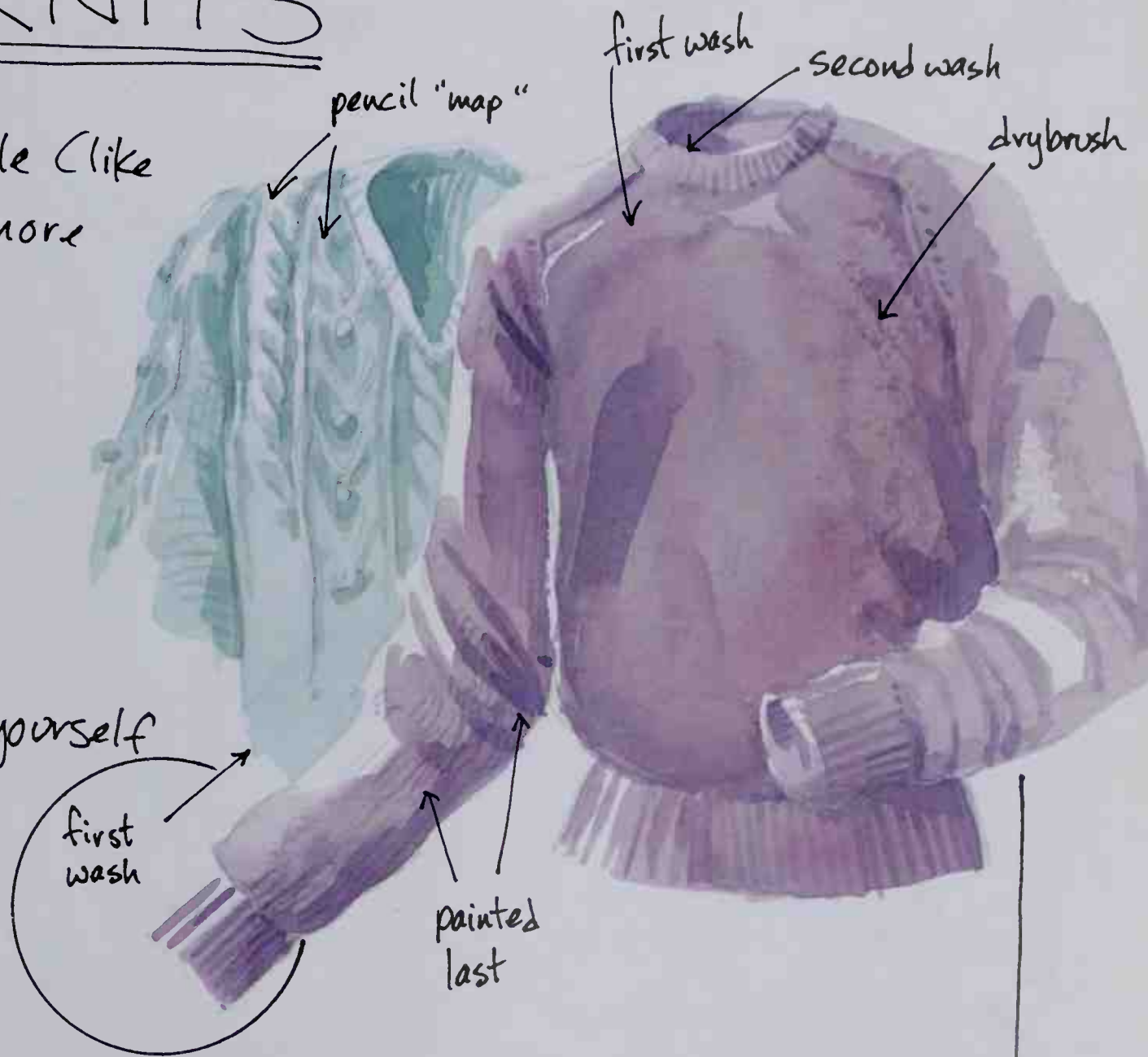
FABRICS... herring bones and plaid

Painting herringbone-patterned wool is just like painting corduroy - first wash, shadow wash, and details.

Plaid, on the other hand, takes a bit more thought. Here, you might draw yourself that roadmap to make sure the pattern makes sense.

logical shadow - shapes, some edges softened

pattern mainly in shadows works well

folds "mapped" as well

drybrush can be used for texture

first wash and shadows

over lapping lines suggest woven plaid

one of these textures might be used as a final step.
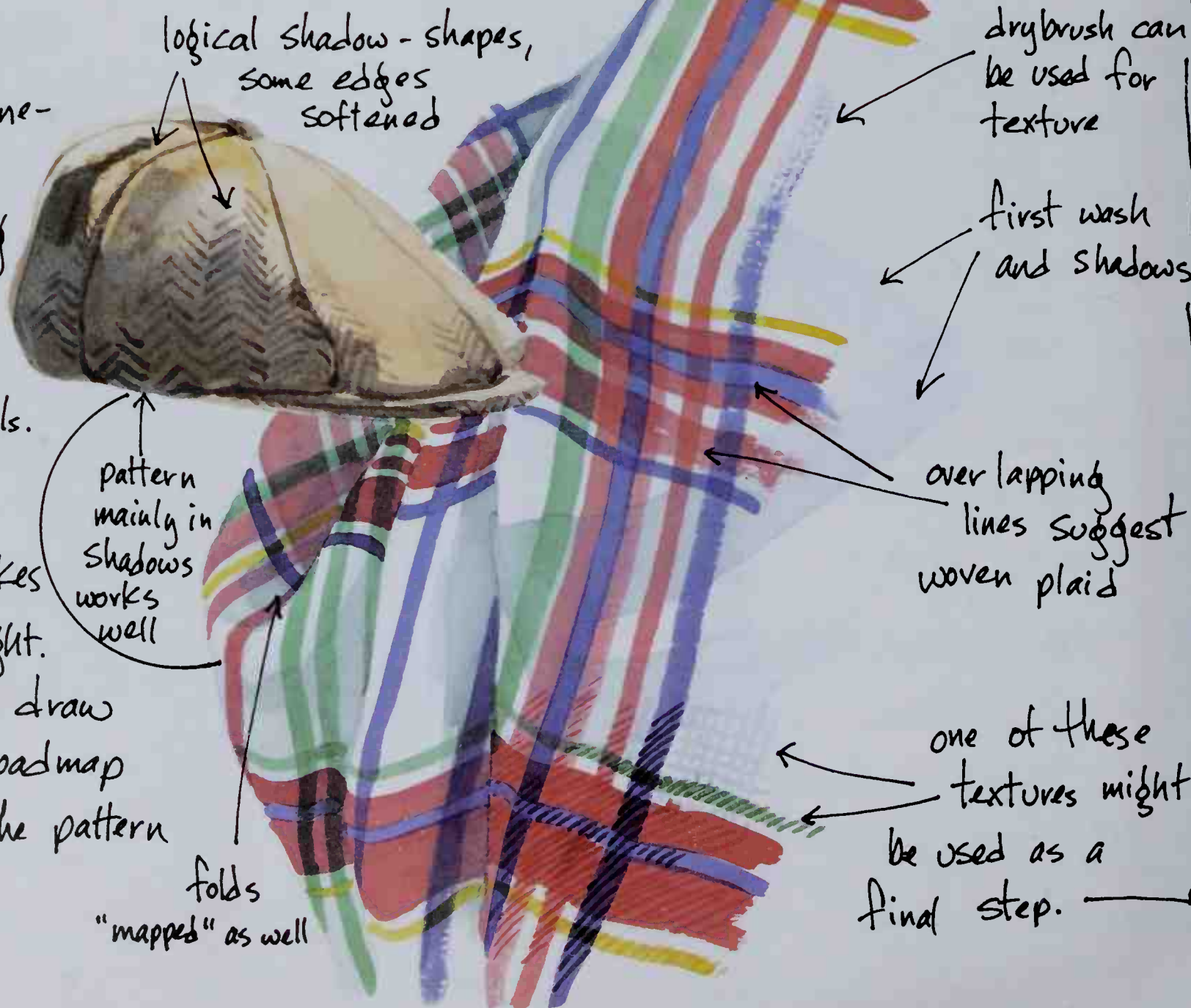
FANCY
FABRIC

lace, tulle, satin

satin has well-defined folds accentuated by strong values—lots of light and dark

tulle is somewhat stiff and rather transparent; be sure to catch the see-through quality
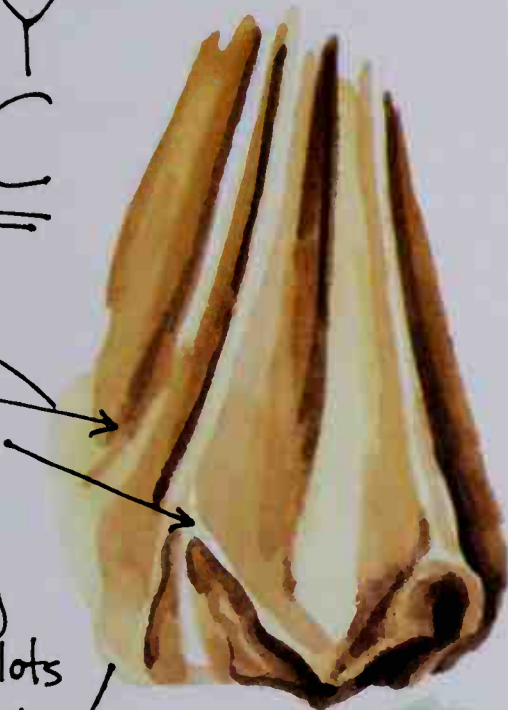
eyelet lace, "mapped" + painted directly

handmade lace—negative shapes are important here

lace dipped in pigment + stamped on paper

lace painted through, like a stencil

...ngi and feathers....

first wash

secondary washes

white-paper shine

texture dots

scraped-in details

soft, fine, downy

first wash

...his shelf ...ungus has ... pronounced ...xture - I ...t the raking ...ght help define it.

final details

ridges on stem

This yellow-shafted flicker's feather had a nice variety of textures

final details

This little mushroom, on the other hand, was smooth and glossy, except for the barest minimum of details.

If I were painting a flicker's feathers from a distance, this is how it would look

scales and seashells....

from a greater distance, a series of dots is fine

first wash

close-up
fish scales

Many creatures have scales -
fish, lizards, +
snakes among them.
Most are somewhat
shiny, but some
are dry and
granular. Leave
that white paper
to catch the shine!
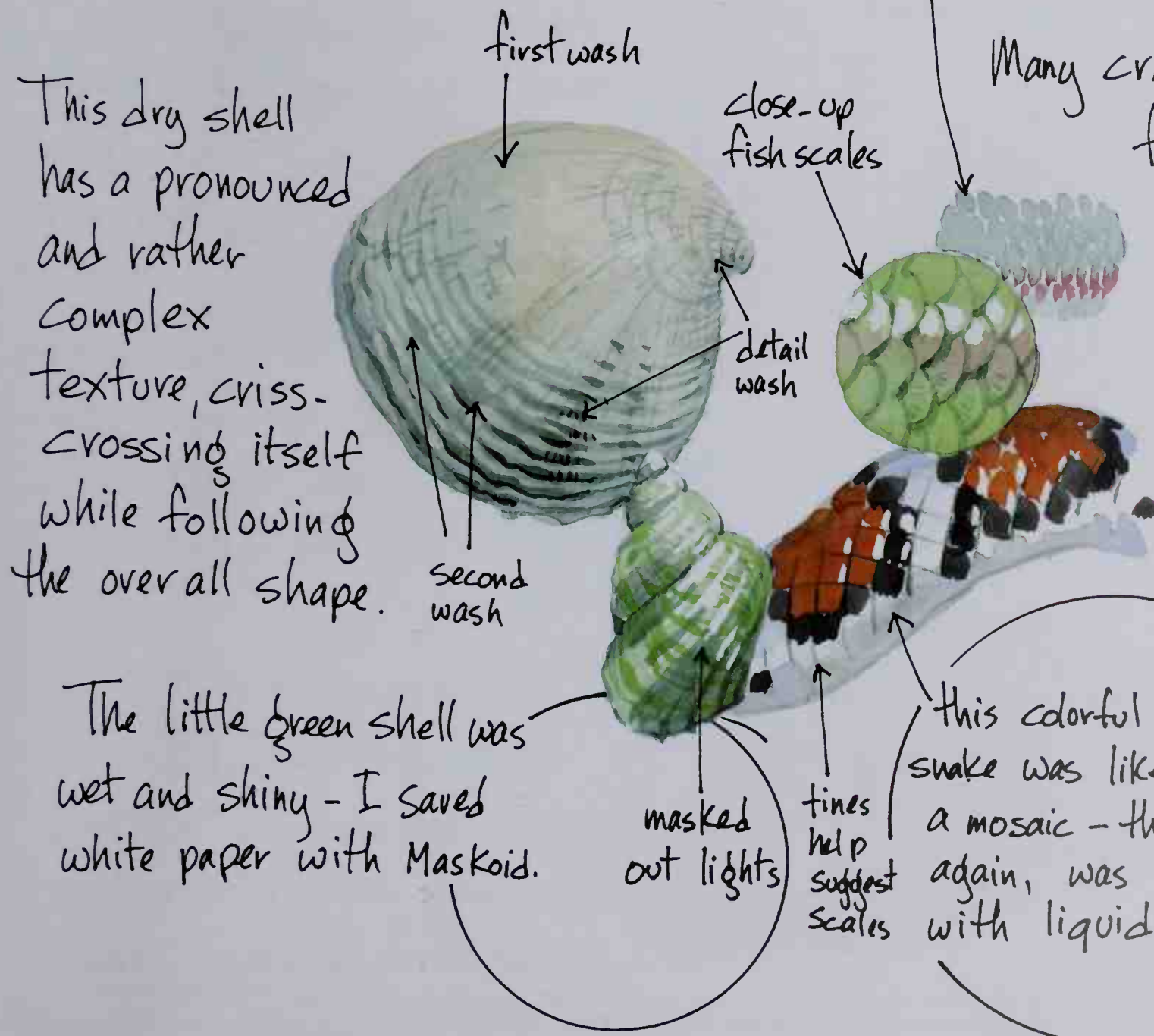
This dry shell
has a pronounced
and rather
complex
texture, criss-
crossing itself
while following
the overall shape.

detail
wash

second
wash

The little green shell was
wet and shiny - I saved
white paper with Maskoid.

masked
out lights

tines
help
suggest
scales

this colorful
snake was like painting
a mosaic - the shine,
again, was saved
with liquid Maskoid

rest floor....

this Maskoid was applied
with a handy stick
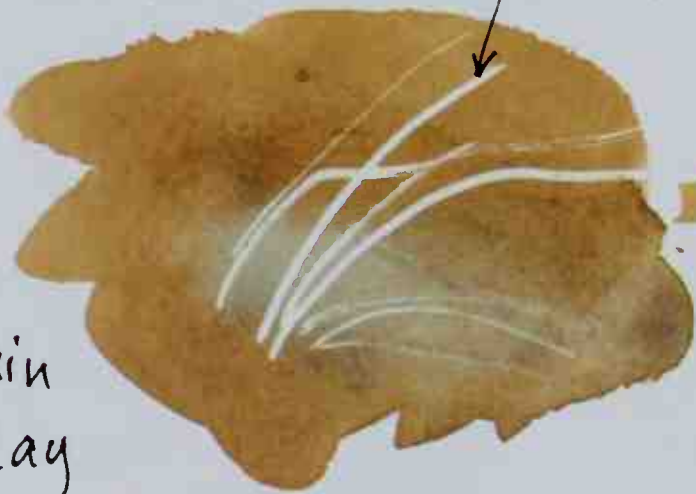
Step 2... with masking agent still
in place, begin laying in
secondary washes to suggest
the spaces
between
leaves. A
few blades
of dead grass
and spatter add
to the illusion.

p 1...
sk any
as you
t to remain
ter and lay
a varied
st wash.

spatter

shadow
shapes
and leaf
veins
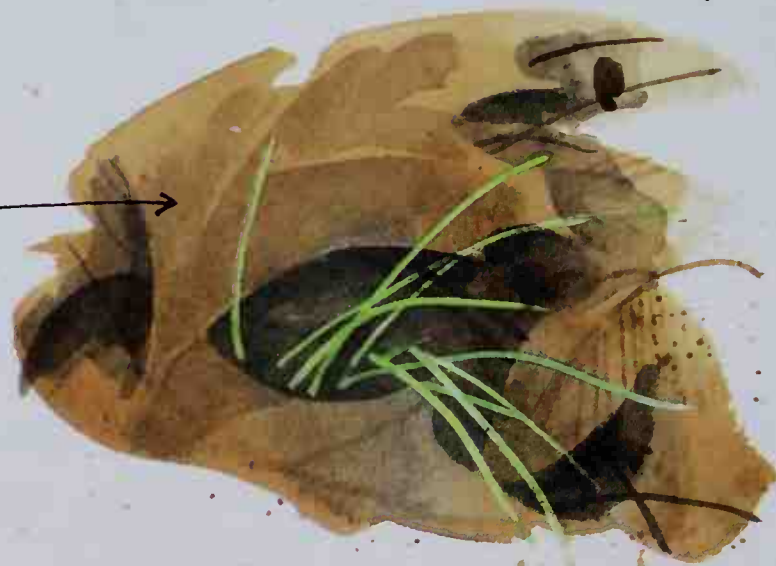
Step 3... complete
details of leaf litter
when preliminary washes
are dry, and remove Maskoid.
Paint these reserved areas
as you choose.

Step 1...
mask out
details you
want to
preserve,
like light-
struck
edges &
spines,
then add
first washes

allow these color
washes to dry, or paint
wet-in-wet
for blend-
ed
color

Secondary wash

desert cactus....

Step 2... Secondary
shadow washes
define shapes
and suggest
depth

watch
for color
variations

Step 3... remove Maskoid
and paint final, sharp
details — spines, prickles,
details within shadow
areas.

2
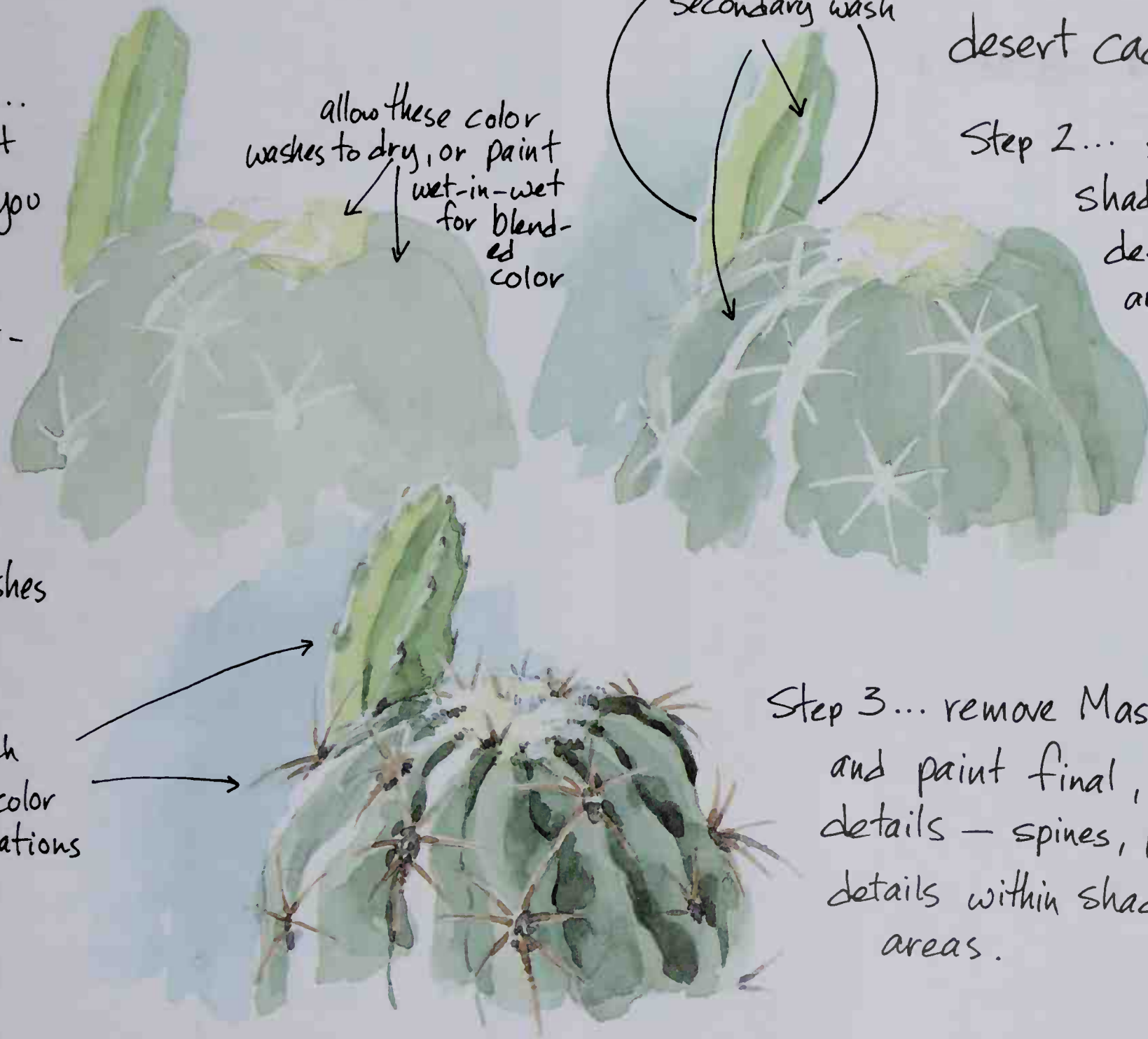
verlapping,
graceful
shapes

rich textures -
spatter,
scraping,
etc.

DOMESTIC TEXTURES

curtains, stucco, wallpaper...

These interior textures
can be fun — lovely, transparent
curtains are just a matter
of overlapping translucent
washes, and stucco or
rough plaster can be almost
like finger-painting.

Wallpapers, on the other hand,
are more like painting
patterned fabrics, requiring
a bit more planning &
care.

_basketweaves and polished wood...

the type of basket you have
and what it is woven
from determines its
texture. An Ozark
basket made from split
oak splines is very different
from a fine Navajo example.
Plan ahead - make a map if
need be - for best results.

Like glass and metal,
polished wood has a lot of
lights and darks - a strong
value pattern.

this simple, woven
pattern is typical of Ozark
style

final details
help say "basket"

sunlit area has modicum of detail

second
wash
defines
shape

in strong sunlight you only see the glow,
not the grain
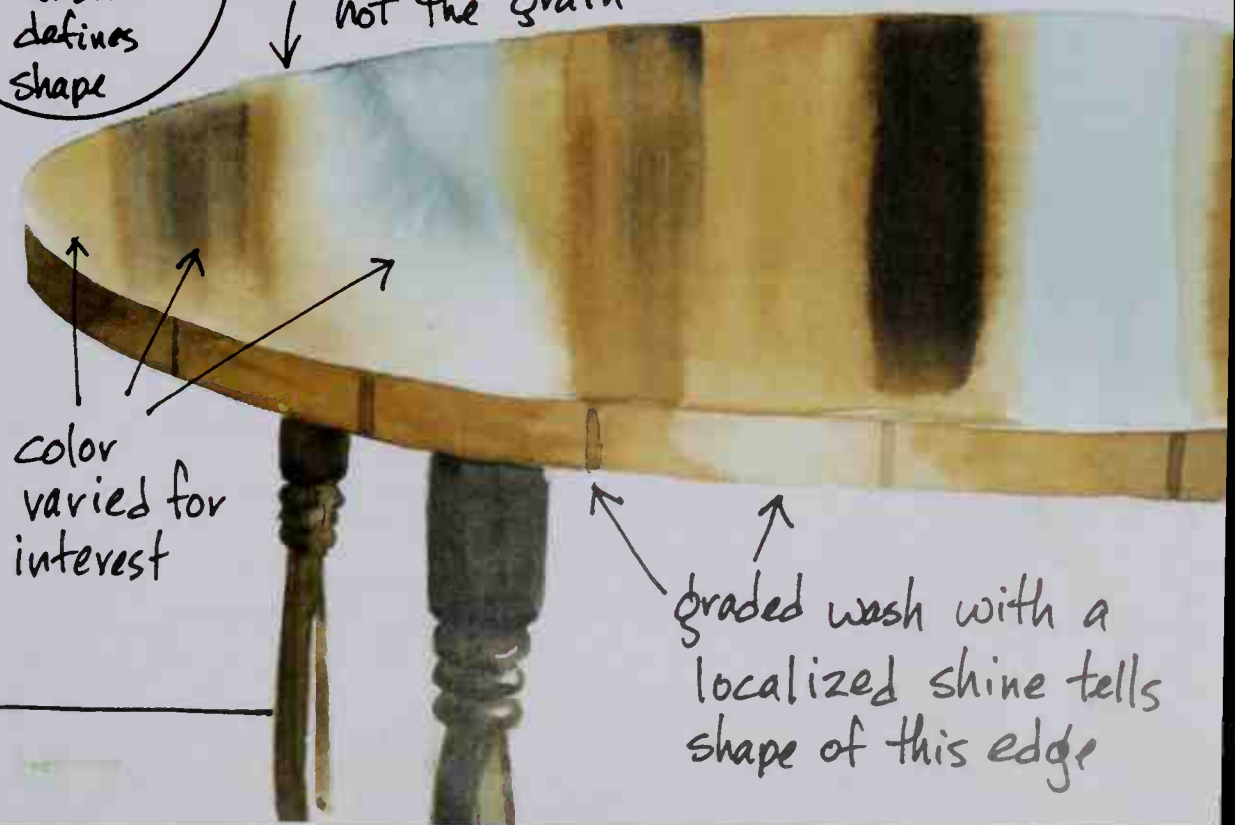
color
varied for
interest

graded wash with a
localized shine tells
shape of this edge

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"I was born with a pencil in one hand and a watercolor brush in the other" says Cathy Johnson, artist/writer/naturalist. She began painting as a child and went on to study art at the Kansas City Art Institute.

Prior to becoming a full-time freelance writer and artist, Johnson worked as an artist for Hallmark Cards and as art director for a Kansas City television station and two advertising agencies. She is currently a contributing editor to *The Artist's Magazine* and has written articles for *Sports Afield*, *Early American Life*, *Mother Earth News* and numerous other publications. She is also the author of *Painting Nature's Details in Watercolor* and *Watercolor Tricks & Techniques* (both North Light Books).

Johnson's work has appeared in numerous regional and national shows, twice in Watercolor USA, and is included in various private and corporate collections.

She lives in Excelsior Springs, Missouri with her husband and their many cats.

TRUCTION

Creating Textures in Watercolor

Texture in your paintings creates depth and makes them come alive. Here Cathy Johnson teaches you how to create textures that are accurate and believable. You'll learn how to:

Observe different tree bark textures and recreate their shadows and patterns in your own paintings, like this *Locust Gall*.

Paint varying fur patterns, incorporating the technique of using an underwash, modeling and final details to create the texture you want, as in *Margaret and Friends*.

Capture the silkiness of a child's hair by using color washes and scraped-out highlights, as shown in *Miranda*, right
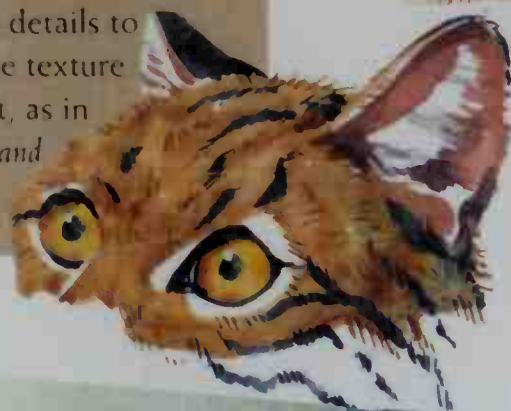
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